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RIVERSIDE~~~~~
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JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS



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# RIVERSIDE PAPERS.

BY

JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS.

Soul, full-rigged, and well-equipped,  
Speeding down the 'Measured Mile,'  
Freight of Wisdom, yet unshipped,  
Waiting issue of the Trial;  
Think you this your only cruise,  
One short stretch of river-tide?  
Think you then to sink and lose  
Name and Port upon your side,  
Gulphed where Time's black mud-banks lie,  
Lost for ever in their fold?  
Or, completed, back to hie;  
Then, with this world's freighted hold,  
Grand state-cabin, white and gold,  
Fit for Him we 'Master' call,  
Will you not, full stately-tall,  
Sweep the All-immortal Sea,  
Tropics of Eternity?

J. D. H.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS.

Ob. 21 Aug. 1879. Æt. 29.

# RIVERSIDE PAPERS.



## I.

### FRANK THE FERRYMAN.

THE broadest of all the pastoral rivers of England flows by many a village and hamlet distinctive and interesting, both as to place and people. It is but little known to any stranger, other than the occasional artist or sportsman, who rents some September shooting along its banks; unknown, because the "boating man" who rows the summer months away on this pleasantest of all boating rivers, sees as a rule about as much of the field and home-life of these village-folk, as does the winter wood-cock of the place in which, tired out and wingsore after

his flight across the Northern Ocean, he rests, ere he travel westward again to his six-months' home.

And of all these pleasant villages, is there one more pleasant than that of Otterford? Or, as they have it in the old church records and the County Directory, Otterford-beyond-the-Elms. A place now, however, forded by no more savage animal than "Tickler," the sweep's white donkey, or Jerry, his black master, or by some stronger and more venturesome water-rat bound on a mid-night crusade of love. Nevertheless, O reader, if we may lift the latchet of thy creaking bedroom-door some morning before the sun has dried the dew, will we not lead thee out to a place along the river tow-path, where opposite the Nine Islands thou shalt see the "mark" where a great bitch-otter has already been along, rubbing and beating down the long reeds and meadow grass with her sleek wet sides as she went.?

Those who pass Otterford upon the river see only two of its buildings—the

little "Ferry Inn," where the bargees loiter while their great hay-barges slowly push across; and the Monastery, an old riverside abode, where many a gay monk has prayed, and many a fair lady sighed. But it is only now an ivy-covered ruin, with the exception of half of what was once the Refectory, and some two or three garrets in which an old-world dame, with her stalwart, half-daft daughter keep themselves and their ancient chattels. The other, hardly more modern-looking building, divided off from the Monastery by that row of Lombardy poplars, soaring up and gently stroking the midday sky—the little homestead, with those two quaintly-cut box trees in front and towering elms behind—is the "Ferry Inn." Behind those diamond casements David Cox, and the prolific Morelands, and many another artist, lay between the lavender-scented sheets, and dreamed of how they would paint that distance beyond the pines, on the hill the other side the stream.

Besides these, the visitor to Otterford sees, too, the Rush-barn, where the rushes and osiers are stocked in "bolts," ready for the barge that is to take them past many a lock and weir, down, down to the Great City, the hungry maw of man; and they see the two carved benches on either side the gabled porch—rustic thrones, with canopies of jasmine and batchelor's buttons hanging on the wall above them. Here, of evenings, the villagers sit and smoke in the places where their fathers, and their fathers' fathers, sat and smoked. Maybe they sometimes look up at the old painted sign-board, now dim with blistering sun and winter blast; but it still swings with the three barge-horses, standing nose to tail as they are being ferried over in the long black horse-boat, and which still shows the gentle grace and genius of a master hand and eye. The visitors see too, the ferry-landing—and then old Frank the Ferryman, as they turn their heads up-stream to a warning "ahoo-ey, maisters," and lie on their oars for him to pass their

bows with a freight of thirsty harvest-men, sitting in a little circle round their big brown empty jugs. Or perhaps they see the "missuses" of those harvest-men, who have been to market through "the Thicket" to Stow-Sutton, and are returning with big square baskets which they nurse on their knees. Or may be Frank has a noisy crew of merrily laughing children who trail long rushes behind his punt, or try to clasp fingers scarcely bigger than birds' feet round one of his great spare punt-poles; or lean over and throw kisses to their twin brethren in the clear stream alongside. And so the strangers lie on their oars, till the current begins to take them down-stream again—so intent are they on watching the children, who are only waiting till the punt shall grate on shore, to jump out and disappear at the turn of the lane which leads up to the half-hidden red gables of the village. But the strangers do not see—they are too near or too far away—the short old Norman tower, with its four belfry-horns and weather-boards, looking

like the closed visors of four old Norman knights, who all the week through keep silent watch upon Otterford-beyond-the-Elms, but on Sundays open the black bars of their casques, and peal out sounds of joy and greeting to bronzed men and rosy women, as they trudge their way across the fields, to beseech in broad and honest accent, the good Lord to prosper "the kindly fruits of the earth."

Then there is the Post Office, with its "Wild Birds Protection Act," in the mulloined window, framed with glass jars of "Bull'seyes," and "Hundreds-and-thousands," and other "sweeties" of larger calibre and stronger flavours—are we not aware of them on Sunday in Church, when the psalms are over and the prayers have begun? A fine old place is the Post Office, with its ochre-washed flint walls and dark broad oak-beams; beams such as trees can hardly grow now-a-days—and if they could, here would not be their resting place; for this house was built when homesteads were made, not for

a generation, but for children's children to dwell in. We had an affection for that Post-Office, although no orders could ever be cashed there, or change given for any more valuable coin than a half-crown. Did not the big-waisted and benignant Post-mistress sell here the best honey in the village, taken from those dear old-fashioned thatched 'bee-pots,' that look like miniature hay-stacks standing in triple row; and did she not give it us in jars, such as no modern potter careth to make?

Just beyond, at the top of the village, a high-road runs across from somewhere or other to a little market-town; but no railway is heard, or station seen. Here are no hoardings with advertisements from town to trouble rustics with "New Manures," and "Artificial Cattle-feed"—for Otterford-beyond-the-Elms is behind, or properly speaking, beyond the Iron Age.

The little market-town stands in another shire, and is a countryman's "foive mile an' a bittock away." So Otterford keeps itself



to itself five days of the week, and only on Fridays makes its feeble raid on the resources of Lustlow-in-Arden.

Once, indeed, two mail-coaches rattled past in the day ; but although each smart and dashing guard blew lustily his "yard of brass," as the leaders trotted down the straight, coming in at the top of the village, this was only to frighten the young chicks off the road, in front of the "Sun and Whale-bone." No stoppage was ever made, though, at this inn, for it was licensed only as a "jerry shop," and with no bait stables handy, there was no inducement to man or beast—such as these—to stay.

Otterford had its mill ; unlike other mills, too, for is it not driven by the smallest stream in the county ? Yet in the thirstiest of seasons does not the "tick, tack," of its venerable wheel keep up a ceaseless roundelay, when all its more portentous river-brothers can only work off and on for two or three hours a day, and then with a creaking and groaning come to a miserable stand-still ?

There, in every beam, from the flour-bewhitened weather-cock to the old iron-bound "grin'stone" door-step, is a history—a tragic history, too, though only three people in the world know it yet—that young and ill-favoured miller, and his young and well-favoured sister, and, as lawyers put it, "another,"—for that fair-haired child as yet knows nothing except flowers and "flutter-bys." But the child will one day perhaps grow into a man, and then that man will make a fourth, who shall wake in the night in time to come, at the hour when flutter-bys give way to bats, and sit up and peer into the past of an unknown tragedy.

We are sorry now that the back-ground for our picture, "The Escutcheon of the World," was ever finished—though it did provide a winter's existence; for otherwise we should have been again revisiting these places and people, paintable and unpaintable. We are sorry, too, when we think of how we dreamed away many of those days, thinking little, and doing less, and of how

we missed knowing about some of those with whom *now* we have no chance of converse.

There was the strange tale of the old woman at the Monastery, which she never told—and now shall never tell; and the many more stored in the big head of the malevolent “Bottle-back,” the last “Cocker” in the county, who held a deadly feud with her, and “knowed a more about her nor she cared ’im to;” and who, even in these later days (so report ran) would at some church-feast still “squail” his cock on the quiet, for the delectation of a select few of his gamester acquaintances—who all had their running dog or two, tied up in the wood-barn at home.

Then there was the tale of Frank the Ferryman. Though no one ever did know much about him or his, except perhaps the little governess up at the Maisonnnette, across the river—and that was only just as we were leaving, and it happened by an accident, or by Fate—as you will; and was so strange

that it was more like what one reads about in a tale.

Poor old man ! had he looked a little less simple and a little more weird, he would have made an excellent model for a Charon. He had a habit of taking his rest, unlike the other villagers—who slept or lounged in the tap of the Ferry—by sitting upon a certain “stool,” or stump of a willow-tree, which history related had been felled by himself, but for no specified reason. Therefrom he would gaze vacantly and sadly across the water towards Pilgrim’s Hatch—a farm, round the outbuildings of which ran the foot and bridle-path, from Stow-Sutton to where the punt grounded to take wayfarers across to Otterford.

Here, by the hour together, would the old man sit, when no one was coming or going across, and when he had finished stacking his bats of wood that lay upon the little green wharf, ready for the timber-barge. Poor old Frank ! He was then over seventy, and, alas ! about to give up ferry-

ing for ever, not by choice, but by compulsion, and to retire—not on any pension, or on anything he had scraped together, but upon Union fare, until the Great Ferryman should at last heed his weak cry of “Over, O—ver!” and taking the old man gently across, land him tenderly and safely within sight of a new, more peaceful and more blessed Pilgrim’s Hatch.

An inoffensive, silent, seclusive old man; who at no time of his life had ever overreached a soul; and who, as he never went to church, never got drunk, never molested anybody—and also as there happened at that time to be no especial village-idiot about—was noted from parson downward, as “half-sharp”—although the idea of “sharpness” entering into any part of Frank’s innocent composition was ridiculous. The villagers were never afraid for their boats, for, as they said of Frank, “he was but a harmless moon-taught wight, an’ whiles a bit daft.”

Frank was, or had been, above the middle

height; spare, with a face on which no hair had ever grown, wrinkled and gnarled, yet with a colour in it, and a something indescribable, which made you at first wonder whether after all it was not that of a boy—the reason being that Frank's framework had been originally constructed to encage a centenarian, but his taciturn and morbidly solitary habits, together with three-score years of "rheums and ag'ies," had so drawn up his face, and pushed down his head into his shoulders, that now he was at the best a broken man. One by one had his rotting teeth fallen from his bowed head into the stream of the Past, so that now, bent, and all but toothless, as well as tongueless, he looked as if he were trying to eat his chin, as he sat upon his willow stool, silently gazing across the river, and mumbling his mid-day bread and onion.

Frank never cared to chum up to any body, yet everybody knew him, "to talk to,"—that is, he would tell of floods and flushes and low-waters, and such like, as you, sitting

on the punt-well, shouted your queries to him. Sometimes he would even become so communicative as to vouchsafe an opinion of his own—such as that, “he’d ’ear folk tell of ’ow they swans sang a dyin’, but he didn’t give no credit, for *he’d* never ’eared ’em; but that they *did* hatch their eggs whilst the summer thunder was a-playin’ about, an’ that was wat it was sent fo’.” But no one ever knew Frank any better than this. He always fought shy of questions leading up to himself, and of all conversation retrospective or introspective.

He was considered as an old-fashioned and clumsy machine, which worked a bit more roughly when rusted with the rheums, but, like a machine, with no individual temper of its own: never knowing the villagers well enough to quarrel with them; willing to do any slight service, but never talking about it; kind to children (who loved to play round him, just as they loved to go to sleep in the dark, with some one about), but never talking to them—the tacit understanding being, on his

part, tolerance—on theirs, sense of security in his proximity. All the village-dogs knew and liked him, but he never called them by name or spoke to them. As there are songs without words, so was Frank a conversationalist without conversation—not a bad fault though, in days like ours, when men who can and will talk, succeed in giving us no clear idea of anything except that they themselves are moist and yielding molluscs with hats on.

A hard-hearted bargee one day stole poor Frank's Sunday (and only) smock, inside of which was wrapped a gorgeous red-silk handkerchief, and inside again, a piece of bacon; but Frank was not half so "put about" as was the kindly hostess at the Ferry. Indeed, when he was asked by the energetic and officious policeman, he could scarcely be got to mention anything but the bacon, and on being further pressed, "Couldn't tell nowt as to 'ow 'eed know the ole slop agen."

One could be sure that Frank had led a



lonely life for the greater part of his seventy years; but at least *once* in that time he must have thought he would like a fare for a longer journey than that across the river, for he had married. But even his wife couldn't stay long with him; and leaving him two infant boys, both under two years of age, she went off one morning in a box the village carpenter and wheel-wright had made for her, and which contained one of her two best sheets, for a quiet corner of the church-yard, just beyond the Arlington vault.

The youngest, a mal-formed child, left him, too, the next Hallowmas; but the elder stayed, and grew up a ne'er-do-weel—"a hout an' hout radical," as the neighbours said, until he also went—being made to go. Some seven or eight years ago he got into a poaching affray with the keepers over at Fayrewood, and was sent over seas for a long term; thus forming the third village clearance made about that time. Village-folk said that Frank

set great store by this radical, and took his departure greatly to heart, "takin' on most wonderful-like!" But Frank never said a word about the lad to anyone; and both wife, and cripple, and radical, always seemed to us to be part of a mythical legend, made true by Time. For Frank was a bachelor by the very look of him, a thorough confirmed anchorite, both by circumstance and inclination. He threw scraps to other people's dogs; he gave his horny hand to other people's children: he ferried all the village over to the annual May-fair. But he had no dog of his own; he possessed no child that called him, "Fayther;" nor did *his* slop, before it was stolen, ever see the inside of a wax-work Exhibition or sparring-booth at the village fair. Frank's life was like that of a cross-road finger-post, whose outstretched and untiring arms guide our careless steps aright to many a roof and ingle-side, warm and glowing with love and laughter, but whither itself shall never come.

Sometimes the "Hall" people came down

to an *al fresco* tea on the Monastery lawn, or gave a feast to the villagers after hay-harvest ; but Frank never went. And after tea, when the fiddlers had nearly played their elbows off, and the hot and thirsty swains, who had stood up to each and every country-dance, were resting with their bonny lasses on the bank, they could see him through the trees, some hundred yards away, sitting upon his stool, watching and waiting for—what ? “ Why, to putt’n they fiddlers across the water, as cum from over behind the hills, to be sure ; what else could it be for ? ”

On such a night Frank sat up later ; but usually he went off to bed as soon as the bats were abroad — anyone returning late was ferried over, after a prolonged shouting, by the host of the inn, or by some of the yokels who were loitering about. On rare occasions, some stray reveller’s voice would be heard in the middle of the night, calling through the mists for the ferry. After a few beseeching cries of “ Over, over, o—ver, o—ver ! ” Frank’s answering,

“Aye, aye!” or the rattle of the punt-chain, would re-assure the returning rustic *roué*; and in a few seconds measured splashes and intervals of dead silence would herald the appearance of Frank’s faithful (and probably double) form to the drunken, half-frightened, and superstitious yokel, who, after a recognition, and a reel, would come to safe anchor in the bottom of the punt, and in hoarse and broad accents inform the silent, uncomplaining ferryman that the penny “must bide till next toime.” After an effort, the yokel would get his legs together, and, poising his arms, perhaps manage to zig-zag about up the road, till he reached home, without extemporising a ditch into a half-way house, in which to sleep till day-break. Or perhaps, more drunken still, he would in a friendly manner make it known that his intentions were “to put up along o’ Frank in the barn,” and would thereupon share a bed of dried rushes in the withy-barn, which was Frank’s on sufferance all the summer months. Here Frank slept, and

here, on a shelf under the eaves, he kept his wardrobe, consisting only of a shirt, and a curiously whittled ground-ash walking-stick, now that the smock and handkerchief had gone off with the bargee, who having shared Frank's bed one wild night, had got up too early for him in the morning.

Frank had been better off, while his wife was alive—so people said; he had a cottage to himself, the little one, up village, next the Post-Office. But his son went away with the gyves on—proud and erect, hard as nails, except when he took the old man's hands between his fetters, and said, "Good-bye, fayther. It's a bad job, but I'll come back when they lets me, and stand by ye till I dies!" And after that, there was no one to cultivate the garden, for at that time Frank was woodman on the Arlington estate, and his son worked the crops, which were generally noted for their quantity, and which were annually bought up by a tradesman in Stow-Sutton. After Fred's departure, the

old man never put spade to earth in his garden, neither would he let others. The apples fell by bushels, and rotted on the ground for want of gathering up ; but Frank was obstinate, and as he lost the proceeds which helped him to pay his rent, at last he got into debt, and was turned out. "An' no wonder, too," said all the village, "when he's that daft he ought to be looked arter." It was then that the landlord at the Ferry took him, out of charity, as ferryman ; and as William had no better place handy, Frank used the rush-barn to sleep in all the summer ; and in flood-time, and through the winter, came into the house and lay along the settle in the tap-room. Rushes were comfortable enough things to sleep on when they and the room above them were dry. But when October floods rode down the river five miles an hour, and with a spurt to spare in them, while the driving rain leaked in upon the few rushes left for Frank's bed—the others having long since gone away in the barge—even Frank was brought out of

his den at such a time, loth as he ever was to change it for the tap-settle.

This October, however, the roof over one of the disused and rotting garret-chambers of the Monastery had been made more water-tight for him; but Frank never took kindly to his new abode, although an extra blanket, and a chair with two boards nailed across it, had been added to his other properties. He would light his dim horn-lantern, and go across the lawn every evening about nine o'clock; but whether he stayed all night long in his weird chamber is a mooted point in our mind, for one wild autumn midnight, we found him sitting on his willow-stool with his back against the lee side of a stack of wood—but then, as he said, “They Monastery rots was so wonderful frisky, over they boards, as no mortal never could get no rest.”

Frank was an extraordinary man in one particular—he never had any money, never asked for any, and never seemed to want

any. He reminded one of the "sandwich" advertisement-men who crawl down our "long unlovely" streets, one behind the other, in Indian file, like a row of tortoises set up on end, and who get a shilling a day, and their "board"—with this slight difference, that Frank never got his shilling. All the ferry-pennies were righteously carried up to the inn, and formed a not unproductive item in the receipts of the poor and hardworking host—who had also, in the lease and goodwill of the inn, the rights of fishery, and of cutting rushes from the grass eyot below to the Nine Islands above, with the rights of pasture, and of cutting underwood thereon—two of said islands being about the size of a table-cloth—but with no power to top, lop, or crop any of the larger trees. Moreover, William had all the reed-beds, rush-beds, and withy-cobs between the aforesaid places, and the right (with aquatic reservations) of drawing the eel-bucks. These rights constituted William farmer as well as publican, and paid better than small



beer and cyder. The ferry was, of course, like all things else, "not what it used to be;" but yet it brought its quota towards feeding the bairns.

Frank, however, had no royalty on the ferry-toll. In return for ferrying, he had his board and lodging, which included small beer and tobacco, in both of which luxuries he was most moderate. The parson called Frank a miser, because when one Christmas-time he had given him half-a-sovereign, no one had ever seen him spend it—in a place where everybody's every sixpence can be accounted for. Also, Frank had been seen to accept a coin proffered by boating gentlemen now and then; and he would now and then call and pay for a stranger's beer, but this was like a looked-for legacy—not coming often. On the whole, Frank had as little to do with the filthy lucre of this world, as ever good Sir Thomas could have wished for in his dream-garden of Utopia. Most of his clothes, such as they were, never wore out; the two shirts waxed and waned in rotation

and respectability, the only changes they knew being the variegation in colour of the new patches and stitches; while his trousers were of that corduroy-pattern which might aptly be called cast-iron. The landlord's boots, when worn out, made excellent new ones for Frank's accommodating feet—but then Frank had not much walking to do, and as the riverside was all turf, it was only metaphorically speaking that his lines were cast in stony places.

He was now, however, undoubtedly getting past the work of the ferry, and, poor old man! his asthma made him wheeze when he was punting, like some leaky tap to a steam boiler. So at last Frank was condemned, after he had, one unfortunate day, imperilled the baker's horse and cart, with its loaves as big as bee-hives, and frightened the baker out of his wits. All which happened through Frank's not being strong enough to stem the stream, and having to drift with the whole kit, down almost to the grass-eyot, before a landing could be effected

from the unwieldy horse-boat. Poor Frank was to leave, and at short notice. Unfortunately, in this surging and heaving struggle for existence, which we call "Life,"—and in which to live is to elbow out and tread down our brother—the landlord was a poor man, and had a large family of small children, and a wife who bore him a rosy-cheeked bairn every year, as surely as her apple tree up in the potato-bed bore a crop of rosy-cheeked apples.

So Frank was to go. He could not even be kept on as a retainer; for though he held the children as well as any nurse, and could do any odd job of light work, yet all this was included in the legitimate duties of ferryman, and William could not afford to keep two mouths of masculine capacity where one would do. Folks said that Frank "took on about goin';" but if they were right, it was from mere instinct, for he never talked about it, nor showed any outward sign.

We were putting up our easel for the

last time, for we were leaving summer quarters. Twenty yards off, Frank was sitting on his willow-stool, like some hooded hawk on perch. Now and again the splash of a rising chub or the thud of a heavy barbel struck the still evening air; the wind had dropped, and ever and again came the home-sounds up at the inn, and the creaking of the well-chain as the bucket ran down—then the echo of the strike as it reached the water—then stillness again. Frank was sitting motionless, his face scarcely visible, but his chin in outline pointing across the river, like the decrepit finger of some dying man. Then came the distant sound of chafing rowlocks at intervals, then the splash of sculls; and ten minutes after, the pleasure-boat belonging to the Spade-Oak Mill came round the bend, rowed by the merry mill-children, with Caro, their faithful black retriever, hanging his nose over the bows, and a heap of exotic water-lilies in the stern, lying in confusion and langour, with their lithe

necks intertwined. These glided by; and before the boat's widening wake had reached the shores, and made the reeds nod a gentle "good-night" to the happy children, they had passed the grass-eyot, and were out of sight. We were thinking, not of Frank, nor of them—though we saw them all—but of how the prospect would look at sun-down on the morrow, and of how sere and yellow the few leaves would look on that one struggling plane-tree, that loomed in on our lodgings in the Borough. Of autumn—Death, delayed and beautiful in the country—Disease, rank and pestilential in towns. Of fallen leaves spread out, with lingering sunsets painted on them, giving an after-glow of light to autumn wood and cover. Of fallen leaves in town, with damp and trampled faces spread out, and sodden with sickly jaundice and creeping decomposition. But, most of all, of men, to whom we dared not tell our thoughts, for fear of being told that Art had made us—otherwise perhaps decent and convivial enough—a little mad.

Frank was to be envied; for though he, too, must leave these fair scenes which we loved so well, *he* could not—so we argued and decided—feel as *we* did; and then, after all, would he not at least be able to watch the seasons from the Union-windows, and not, as we must, from Christmas bills and ornaments for the fire-stove? It seemed a mockery, as we lay there in the grass, to listen to scraps from that old country drinking-chorus, and its last words,

“Cannikin, nipperkin, and brown-bowl, boys!”

drawled out after the countryman’s idea of singing, and floated down to us from the Ferry. The song of old “Bottle-back,” the ex-cock-squailer, seemed doubly festive to-night. His two roguish terriers, “Crop” and “Stump,” had just passed us up the river-bank, hunting in couple, upon their own account, the troubled water-rats, with a zest for life which for the moment made our own existence seem only the more dismal.

The sun had sunk some time, but it was the season of long-drawn-out twilights, when one wonders if night has forgotten to come. And we thought of the time when "there shall be no night there," and wondered whether it would be a twilight such as this—but not till after many a morrow has scorched the drooping heart.

The river-poplars slowly shaken  
Have beckoned creatures of the night ;  
Wide winged flutter-mice awaken,  
And dart and dwindle out of sight.  
Night nears ; fast fades the fan of glory ;  
And following in the red north-west,  
The after-glow of my life-story  
Shall find a new world for its rest.

\* \* \* \*

A jack was on the feed hard-by, and kept running up the creek close to where Frank was—did he mark it? We turned and looked at him ; his chin, prominent as ever, was pointing—at the jack ?

Suddenly the old man rose, wheezed, and slowly moved down towards the punt. Ah ! his eyes were on the alert then ! It was

the little governess, who had just come in sight round the farm-buildings of Pilgrim's Hatch, and who was coming across the water. How much prettier those willows looked now, with her figure in the foreground. Truly, "still life" is a goodly picture hung in a bad light; and after all, "every prospect pleases" best when man, who is called vile, is there.

It seemed only the other day that we saw her for the first time, her white print dress whiter in the hot morning sun, as she stood on the opposite bank, waiting to be ferried over, and that we insisted on Frank's letting us bring her across for him. But this was two months ago, and we never ferried her over again. For by Chance—that wonderful falconer, who always hoods our eyes before he chooses the place from which he would whistle us off his fist into the open air of Free-will—by Chance, whenever she came down, we were always up inland sketching. Or, if we did happen to be about the ferry, Chance had already put



the slow old Frank in the punt and pushed him half-across, before we had had time to offer our services.

There he was now, just planting the pole to punt off the shallows. It would have been nice to have gone for her ourselves instead, to have casually remarked that we were leaving—and to have watched her after that remark. But Frank was now in mid-stream; and she, all unconscious that anyone saw her so far off, was, in the security of fancied solitude, dancing about on the grass like a young fawn, for very joy of the sense of freedom for a little while, away from the Maisonette. Now she had caught sight of old Frank, and was walking nearly as staidly as she did when we helped her down the bank, and when she kept her clear large eyes so intently fixed upon that lowest row of little rose-buds on her white cotton-dress.

As the far-away is sometimes, at sundown and before rain, brought leagues towards us, so also is there sometimes a mirage of

sound ; and this evening, sounds were very near. We could hear the great stag-beetles beating an incessant tattoo on their horny drum-heads, a long while before they paraded past our post of review. We could hear distinctly the sweet "Good-evening, Frank," of the little governess, followed by the "Good-evenin', Missy," of Frank's gruffer and less distinct vocal chords. Then a silence, while the little lady was being handed into the punt ; and then Frank's heavy footfall on the britton, as he pushed off. What a picture it was ! Often has one more pipe been smoked on a dreary afternoon in the Borough, while again the little governess takes her seat on the punt-well, and Frank, walks towards her, and away backwards from his punt-pole, until, almost touching her, he stands as erect as sixty years of rheums and agues will let him, and slowly passes the long pole upwards through his great brown hands, and as slowly creeps back again up to the head of the punt, for another push.

"They say you 're leaving, going into the —— away, Frank; I'm so sorry. Mr. Peploe said to-day at lunch that you were not strong enough for the ferry now."

"True, missy, I be goin' presently. To night's my last in yon ole rush-barn. Maister Willum be goin' to ride me over to Union in the mornin'. I beant so game-some as I war, but 'tis hard to leave the ole Ferry; I can manage this 'ere punt right enow'; it be yon horse-boat in flood-times as tries me; and Maister Willum ses as 'ow livin' 's too hard now-a-days to keep two, so I must go to Union. It arn't the vittals as I cares for, but it's full-gallop 'ard on an ole man, away from his—"

But at this moment, the bells of Stow-Maries began to chime. Joyfully and soothingly the echoes topped the brow, and then came stepping down the hills, one after other, and then spread out, and roamed along the broad meadows, until far up the river-bank, beside the edge of the wood, those six sweet-throated maidens laid them down,

and one by one dropped gently off to sleep. Lovers of the superstitious would have said that these were choral omens of good fortune to somebody or other; and philosophers—with profounder knowledge—that they were six repeating-decimals in a Law of Chance. Whichever was right, the chiming echoes drowned for the time the old man's complaining, and when again we listened to Frank's tale—we know not how long after, for thoughts and events sail in longer tacks through a day-dream—the little governess was speaking. She had landed, and was leaning against a pollarded willow, and was saying to the old man who stood in front of her, "But, then, Frank, I'm poor, so poor—"

"Na, Missy, it aint that, thank ye kindly, 'e'll find his way back some day, but then—then I'll—"

A song-thrush curving across the river, sprang up, and lighting on a pollard hard by, began piping forth such exulting notes that neither the little governess, nor we

ourselves, heard the rest. Perhaps it remained unuttered, for Frank was never very eloquent.

“’Twas they dogs; it all cum along o’ goin’ back for they dogs—they’rd a-never bin no fightin’, an’ then my Fred ’ud a-been ’ere now. Poor Fred, the mo’ folks named ’im a radical, the mo’ I loved ’im, an’ he war a good lad, let alone people’s talk. I allus loved my Fred most, spite o’ our little Joe as died biddin’ fair to run up crooked. I felt as ’ow Fred needed it most ony way, ’owever it war. I kep’ quiet, an’ said nowt to nobody for years after he fust went away, till at last I got tired o’ bidin’, and then I fell sick-like—beggin’ pardin’ Missy, but after a manner o’ speakin’, not as I *war* sick as you might say; an’ so I cut that pollard down to a stool for I to set on, an’ watch ’long the ways ’e’d cum, an’ I’ve set an’ set the years out, till now my yed’s most ’midst the bees. There was fower on ’em; Long Tom got orf, cos ’e’d a lawyer chap as oathed away at the justices an’ gentlemen as

tried 'em, till he fell back'ards, an' blubbed hisself out o' wind, though he couldn't ave knowed all, for my Fred told me as 'ow it was 'im as 'it Thomas over the yed, an' hurted 'im with a hash-plant he'd cutt'n out o' Banstead's plantation. But poor Fred 'ad no one to speak for 'im. I goes to the 'Falcon,' a-facin the Sessions, an' ast one o' they lawyer gentlemen wat he'd take to speak for the lad, but 'e says, 'Why, a guinea, to be sure, my man. I should think the likes o' you ought to know what you paid the last time you was took up for poachin'.' He wanted a guinea, an' I'd only gotten 'leven an' fo'pence. My sperrits was that afeared, an' I was that put about-like for what to do, that I 'eld my hat round the crowd, an' I got fower mo' shillun, though most on 'em had 'ad nary a sight o' me afore they see'd I with the 'at. But the gent said as 'ow he couldn't take less nor a guinea, an' as he'd lose all 'is clothes if he war to; an' then I offers 'im the fifteen an' fo'pence agen, an' all 'is neibours laughed, an' he wouldn't

be beat down no 'ows—they lawyers do charge terrible dear for speakin' when a wight's in trouble—an' then the trial cum on afore I could get the guinea, an' so poor Fred went over seas. I durn't talk to they village chaps about 'im, they thinks me daft-like, but now I be goin' so soon, I war drawed to tell some one the heft of his history, Missy." The little governess had moved, and was standing behind a tree, so that we could not hear all she said. But what the gently-rising night-wind did bring to us were words so child-like and simple, and yet so tender and wise and sympathetic, that we wondered whether a Fourth—the Great Unseen—was not beside her, prompting, in this hot fire of trouble, the counsel, so wise, as well as so kind, which welled up from the bottom of such a strong soul to the brink of such a child's lips. Words such as these, in ages gone, made greatest men, whom children still love to read of, mount steed, and face dust and blood and death in foreign lands, for those who uttered them.

The little governess was going; but we heard her saying, "And I won't be long, Frank, I'm only going up to the farm with Mr. Wilfred's message; and then you shall take me across again." "Yes, Missy, with your leave, for as you 'eared I tell, you shall be the last, askin' pardin, as I'll ever take across, an' when you're putt'n over, 't will be time to go to bed, an ony o' they village chaps as wants to cum across after, they can put theirselves across, or if so be as they waits till mornin', they'll spy a pëarter an' younger hand at ferryin', an' I a-settin' on yon well with my bundle, an' poor Fred's hash-plant, all a-ready fo' Stow-Sutton Union."

The little governess had turned behind the rush-barn, and was out of sight, while the old man, for the last time, upon the last night of his ferrying, was sitting upon his willow-stool, and had sunk into the old attitude, only that his head seemed a little more bowed. We lay in the grass, now getting heavy with the first dews, and re-



volved thought on thought, in a dream of waning twilight. Two placid swans went down the tide without a sound. All was still and peaceful, and in that drowse which unconsciously drops into first sleep—all, all, but two hearts, and two troubled pairs of eyes that looked across the water.

So we were wrong in thinking that Frank would not miss the ferry as much as we should. Poor lonely old man! More lonely far than that heron, spreading her long wings out on the night, as she sails upwards to the wild marshes, haunt of solitude and mist, where dark treacherous pools, and the never-resting Will-o'-the-Wisp, keep an availing guard against man's intrusion.

\* \* \* \* \*

We turned towards Frank, but he was gone—up to the inn, probably. In a moment, we looked again: the little governess was there, waiting—waiting to be the last whom Frank should ever carry over. We would have jumped into that deep barbel-hole off

the Monastery lawn, rather than offer our services *now*. Perhaps, one day, now that the "pëarter, younger hand" has come, if she be still there, we may proffer once more, and she, looking down at some rosebud near the ground, will perhaps in a whisper say, "Yes."

Frank re-appeared, holding something in his hand. "I've got summut here, missy, if I might make so bold, as I wants ye to keep fo' me. I've 'eared as 'ow parson say I war a miser, an' so I be; this 'ere's wat I've saved an' put by, odd whiles, for Fred. I hid it where I kep' Fred's hash-plant, an' when Bill Timmins stole my slop, he took eighteen shillun as was wropped up in it, but I were afeared, an' dursn't say nowt about the money: they'd put me in gaol, if they know'd as I'd any money, in the Union, an' Fred'll want a start when he cums back. So you'll keep it tight, an' say nowt to nobody, wont yer, missy?"

Frank was drawing the punt up, and the little governess, as she stepped into the head of it, said, "Yes, Frank, that I will, and I

wont tell anybody. I can put it in the Savings Bank for you, and ——”

“Na, missy, thank ye kindly, but I doan’t hold with they things. I never had no larnin’—they larns yer so much, yer gets confused-like, an’ I doan’t b’lieve in putt’n’ money out to use ; but if you’d keep it away with your gownds as you doan’t put on only on holidays, I’d feel safe about it.”

Frank had finished his reasoning, and was slowly punting out into mid-stream. “Well, Frank, then I’ll put it away, and lock it up in the place where I keep things I don’t wish people to see. And then, Frank, I shall come over to Stow-Sutton, and see you, whenever I can get a holiday, and I shall give you a good account of my stewardship, and I shall write and tell you all the news, and you can get one of the nurses, or some one you know, to read it to you. And then, perhaps, one day, I shall come and ask you to guess, and tell you not to be surprised, and that—that I’ve brought your Fred back to you.”

But here the words of the little governess faltered, and trembled, and fell, as do the eyelids of some dying child, when they droop and lift again over tired eyes, that strain their little best to re-assure us, but close for ever in that re-assurance.

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The punt grated on the opposite bank, and in the waning light things grew dim ; and though the air was still, we heard no sound—the little governess seemed to be standing on the bank, holding Frank's hand, and then we could make out one tree, and then another, and then a third, in outline against the cold sky, between her and the old man.

And so the ferryman had taken his last passenger across the ferry. We rose and walked down to the edge of the water, for we, too, would say something of help and hope to the old man, and God for His very pity's sake, would take care for us that it should not be clumsily said.

Frank was not watching the little gover-

ness out of sight—perhaps he thought it unlucky to do so : he had his back to her, and slowly, very slowly, was beginning to unwind the chain from the punt, once more, and for the last time. It had got caught in a nail, and we could hear him pulling at it ; but we hardly heard the impatient cry of “Over, over, o—ver!” from some one coming round the path, a good distance off, by Pilgrim’s Hatch. Ah—and Frank didn’t either—or wouldn’t. He had determined to have his whim of taking the little governess over last, and he wouldn’t wait for this villager. He lifted the punt chain and threw it in the punt, with a rattle that rang exultant round the welkin—when again, as if in answering echo, came the cry, “Over, over, o—ver!” nearer and louder, and we could make out the dark figure of a man, who didn’t mean to be done, and who was hurrying towards Frank, and apparently away from a little shining pale white star, which stood still and twinkled near the Hatch.

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“Over—o—o—o—!” but before the commanding cry was ended, Frank had altered his intention, and had actually gone a few paces up the path! And then the other figure suddenly grew big, bigger than Frank’s, and came up close, and said, “Fayther, Fayther, I’m come at last!”

But Chance had not made Frank alter his intention, for we thought we heard the old man say,

“Put I over, Fred, the stream’s a’most too strong for *me*.”

## II.

OLD LAMBOURNE'S WORK-  
BENCH.

WATER-STOKELEY, in the hundred of Wick-marsh, is one of the smallest and most tranquil of all the river-villages, which, like currants upon a stem, give warm dashes of colour at intervals of every few miles to the broad, long river which drops down between them.

Very little ever disturbs Stokeley, and most of its events when they *do* come, arrive by water, for it is a very cross-country place, though it has a long wooden bridge, with a large and important-looking white board at one end. This board contains much about the tolls to be taken for every sort of cart, carriage, or dray, which ever

man invented; every beast on which man ever fed, or ever put a burden; and also each and every penalty for those wantons who shall damage the piles, piers, or cross-beams, or drive over any vehicle weighing more than six tons. So much, that the would-be-wiser, who stops to read it down—and who looks as if he were taking up his position for a backward somersault as he begins at “Tolls to be taken”—has to stoop so low by the time he gets down to “By order,” that he is unconsciously offering a back for leap-frog.

But quiet as is Water-Stokeley generally, that hot afternoon in the hot month of July, in the year in which Stokeley Church was re-pewed and re-roofed—for this is how the Stokeley-folk remember dates—there was something out of the way going on, or about to go on. That morning, the men who were cutting the first-ripened corn up on the hill-side, stopped more often than was their wont, and held short and broken conversations with each other, while their



wet and gleaming sickles got dry and dim in the burning sun. Then again at "beever-time" those same hot and tired men did not take their usual short sleep, but lying in groups with their backs against the shady side of the shocks of wheat, talked eagerly together about something of more than ordinary interest. Then in the early afternoon, all up the village-street, the women were standing at their cottage-doors, shading their eyes with their brown, silver-ringed fingers; and the children, who had returned for their mid-day meal, from the little school-house, stood, holding each other's hands, in little lessening rows across the village-street, like brown sea-weed-covered groynes that run down to the sea at low-water. They were looking up-street at that ochre-washed old-fashioned building, at the top of the village, "The Checquers Inn," in front of which was a knot of village-idlers, who ought to have been up in the harvest-field, but who were watching the traps and dog-carts arrive.

The stout family-looking farmers, as they reined up at the porch, got heavily down, with a grunt of relief—echoed by the off-side springs—as they touched *terra firma*, and one more grumble at the hardship of “being called on to serve in harvest-time, just when the day-tale men wanted looking after—as if one inquest a week was’n’t enough—but then misfortune always did run double.”

For these had come to meet the “Crowner,” and in the long low parlour of the Checquers to decide according to law, what it was that had laid Edward Parrott, carpenter’s apprentice, upon one of his master’s benches in such a long sleep—with eye-lids half open, just as he left them, when his soul stepped out, two evenings ago, for its strange somnambulist walk through the shadowless shades. They would have to go and see his pale calm face, when the piece of matting which used to cover the carpenter’s geraniums in winter, was taken off; they would be

shewn the one hand open but stiff, and the other shut, clenched round a fishing-float attached to a hook and line, and which had a chub caught at the end, still alive and splashing about in a pail at the side of the bench—making the only noise to be heard in the workshop on that hot July afternoon. And they would be told that Ted had always been a quiet lad, but given to laziness; and that nothing particular was ever noticed in him, except that he was given to reading out of a book, “as told all about lords and ladies, what was allus a pizenning theirselves for love, and then finding out as it was all a mistake.” And then they would hear less relevant remarks—comparisons between this pale figure, and that other paler one which had lain on the very same bench, strange to tell, only a week before.

While most of the jurymen were waiting for the arrival of the coroner, having a glass for the good of the house, and then several more for the good of the guests, while they discussed the probable number of

quarters to the acre in the forthcoming harvest—some two or three had moved apart, and were talking to the host, who had just come out of the yard, from seeing that his serving-man had given a feed of corn to those animals which had come farthest, and sponged out their nostrils. These men talked also about the crops, although they were not so immediately interested; then after family inquiries, they got round to the general topic which had lately been so much discussed in the village—the double event which had caused such a commotion in that quiet little place.

They had all read the account of the "Determined Suicide at Water-Stokeley," in last Saturday's county *Mercury*, which contained the leading facts of the case; but now they heard the host tell over again all *he* knew about Dorothy Lack, or as she was called in the village, Dolly. They listened as he told them how she had a nasty-tempered father who used to treat her badly, and beat her, even up to the time of

her death ; and how, though she had a high spirit, higher than most of the village-girls, she feared, as well as hated him. How, last week, he had accused her of stealing the milk, which she had brought over from the Place Farm, at the bottom of Yantlet Down ; and how Pibbles, the host's serving-man, who happened to be coming down the road from the forge, with Dapplegrim the grey mare, had seen old Jabez standing outside the cottage with an ash in his hand, and shouting up at Dolly's casement ; "That there milk beant a-goin' to bide on yer damned stomach long after I gets hold on ye. Cum down, ye hussy !" Of how he heard Dolly reply in a shrill high voice, that "She'd kill herself first, afore she'd give him the chance to." Of how, half-an-hour afterwards, she was seen running down by Oldley End ; and then how some barge-men found her lying in the water up the Cowleas Meadows—dead, but scarcely out of her depth—in a place where the bank was low, and afforded no chance or possi-

bility of any accident—as all the jurymen said when they saw it.

“She was the most obstinest wench that ever was, but then, as I say,” remarked the host, “her father was to blame, and might have found himself in gaol for it, although no marks was found on her, and he hadn’t touched her. And though he gave her such a bad character at the inquest, and said as how she were such a thief of a girl, the jury said they disapproved of his conduct in general, and told him he’d best keep his temper in future. She *did* look a fine strapping lass, as she lay there on the bench in old Lambourne’s workshop, gentlemen—just like she always looked,” continued the host. “She seemed even then to be sayin’, ‘Do it, if ye dare!’ Why all our village-boys was afeard of her. She used to let ’em know when they tried to come a-courtin of *her*. Only last May-Fair, she clouted Pibbles’ head for him, an’ all because he tried to buss her, an’ she wouldn’t let him. She favoured Ted more, poor lad!

though he was so silly quiet-like, and folks begun to say that they was a-makin' up to one another. But, lor there! they used to quarrel together terrible—not a bit like as I thinks lovers ought to carry on. An' latterly they was a bit cooled an' off with one another, an' they never sat together up in the choir, after the Sunday night as they quarrelled because Ted wouldn't rub the taller off her gown, as had dripped from one of the candles. She was so mighty hot-headed at times, and yet she warnt what you might call nasty-tempered—not like her father's temper, no more 'n her face was. I heard Ted say to her one night, as I was goin' across the bridge after some clover as I warnted, 'Why, Dolly, you're that proud, you wouldn't think our Squire Arlington good enough for you.' 'No,' says Dolly, as bold as brass, an' all hup in a minute. "Of course I shouldn't, if he couldn't understand what my ways meant, idyat!" An' then, when I was a-comin' back in the dark, she was a-leanin' over the bridge, lookin'

down in the stream, so as no one shouldn't see her but Ted; an' though I didn't pass near enough to say, 'Good-night,' or anything, I could hear her a-sobbing, fit to break her heart—but she did have a hot temper, if you like. I never see a finer made girl—an' such a neck!—it seemed quite a pity for such a comely lass to be lying like that—an' all for a drop o' milk, too! But women is rare fools, at times."

"Yes," said one of the jurymen. "But they couldn't bring it in any way different, but *Felo de se*—it was so devilish determined."

"No——" drawled the host, in an absent way, taking a very long time over such a very short word. "But somehow, though I don't go to church myself, one likes to be buried like other folks, with a parson just to say something suitable an' composin' like, an' be carried up to yon church-yard in broad day-light—an' not go sneakin' along to yer grave at dead o' night,



as if you was afeared o' folk a-seein' you. I s'pose it's like a glass o' bitters afore dinner, gentlemen—not as it does you any real substantial good of itself, but then it's more satisfactory an' respectable-like than takin' yer gin raw so early in the day.”

The two or three jurymen laughed, and agreed that the bitters wasn't much account without the gin; while one remarked, kicking at a stone as he spoke, that he “s'posed it was all one a hundred years hence.”

But the coroner and his clerk had just come in sight, driving a hired waggonette over from Lustlow-in-Arden. Another minute, and he had pulled up his screw at the inn-door, and, throwing the reins over the animal's back, as if it were some noble wreck, over which he was heaving a life-line, got down; and after a look round, and a preliminary nod of lordly recognition to one or two whom he thought he had met before, asked, looking at nothing in particular—with up-raised head and exactly two points off the blazing afternoon sun—

"Are we all here?" And then with sudden condescension began chaffing the host. "Well, Dakyn, you'd better get a bed ready for me, if you're going to require my services like this. Stokeley will want a coroner all to itself soon. Let me see, it's a boy, this time, I believe? Are all the witnesses here?" This was said to his very meek and cadaverous clerk, who looked as if the pitching and rolling of the waggonette had brought on a fit of sea-sickness.

"Yes, sir, Edward Parrott, carpenter's apprentice, aged twenty-one," said the clerk, reading aloud from an official paper, and adding in precisely the same tone, "All the witnesses are in attendance."

"Well, then, this way in;" and the county coroner led the way into the long low room at the end of the house, and the inquest began. The idlers watched them in with wonder-struck eyes, that "marvelled exceeding great," and which never winked once in that hot afternoon sun, for ten whole minutes; and whose combined open mouths

could have caught the greater part of any shower of rain which might have happened to fall at the time. After a short interval, during which the jurymen were sworn, they came out again for a walk down to the workshop by the river-side below the mill, where the quiet and lazy apprentice was lying, looking as if, even now, he were not dead, but simply lost in some day-dream, awaiting, half asleep, the call of one he loved, to follow to whichever land that voice might come from. Old Lambourne, the master-carpenter, and Rench, the village policeman, headed the procession down the street, lined at intervals by the women cottagers, who looked at their children, and then at the jurymen, and then said to one another, "Poor lad! an' they say he do look beautiful; an' he never had no mother—just like Dolly, poor soul! but Ted was so gentle-like—he looked as if he warn't never a-goin' to live long. He never were pëart no time."

When the jury arrived at the workshop,

the policeman unlocked the great folding-door, and old Lambourne led the way in, remarking as he did so, "that he had made good store o' corfins, but he'd never a-bargained for a measurin' in the *shop* afore."

"Mind that there paint, gents,—that were for the new dove-cot over at Place Farm, as he war a-workin' at this week, but it'll 'ave to bide a bit now, whiles I get a new hand."

One by one the jurymen stepped in, and last of all, young Lane, the baker, from Stow-Maries, who looked as if he thought *everything* in that workshop were covered with wet-paint; but then this was his first inquest. Old Lambourne went up to the bench, and lifted the matting—the same which had covered Dolly's defiant and beautiful face a week before.

How very still those jurymen seemed to stand, until one looked at the stiller shape in their centre—then one understood what real stillness meant. Coming out of the light and heat, the workshop was dark, for Rench had shut the great door to keep out

the intrusive eyes of the little crowd which had followed down the street. To let in more light, Lambourne opened a half-door on the other side, which creaked and swayed back as if in gentle remonstrance, discovering a distant prospect, and a long sweep of river sleeping in the hot July air. A sweet breath floated in from the stream, cooled in passing underneath the bridge, where it had been waiting idly, to go, it knew not whither, on that languid afternoon ; so it came in here—and as it did so, it blew up a stray pine-shaving on to the apprentice's cheek, which the old carpenter took off as soon as he observed it, and then threw it behind him, as he would have done had he been showing some finished piece of carpentry-work. Young Lane half winced, and then stood still again—as if at a cover-side he had marked some great strange bird spring up and whirr away, invisible and soundless to his brother-sportsmen beside him.

Lambourne took up a long iron holdfast in his hand, and then broke the silence by

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pointing with it to the pail at the side of the bench, and saying, "There—that's a rum thing—that float an' line as you sees there in Ted's hand, belongs to Jack Rench, our water-bailiff, as he lost night-fishin' o' Toos-day night. He hooked that there fish, an' it broke away with him, float, an' line, an' all, and got caught somewheres in the camp-sheetin' in the mill-pool, an' you sees as 'ow poor Ted's a-bin an' landed it fo' him. Next mornin' as I war a-goin' down to my goats in the orchard, 'bout fower o'clock, I sees a suthin' a-bobbin' up an' down at the end o' the mill-race, an' then I goes an' gets the miller's punt, an' then we hooks this 'ere hup with 'im as well."

One juryman—a farmer—suggested that, "May be he saw that float, an' fell forrards in the pool, a-tryin' to reach it," while the miller from Otterford-beyond-the-Elms remarked to young Lane, that "the chubs must run a deal darker up here nor they does down our way." But Lane, who didn't fish, and who was pulling rather nervously

at his hat (he being the only juryman who had taken it off), did not seem to have been struck with this fact, and said nothing. The coroner, who had put on his double-barrelled eye-glasses, looked into the pail, and said it was peculiar, thought they had seen all, and had better be adjourning to the Checquers, and hear the evidence.

So at the mandate of the great official, the apostles of legality slowly backed out, and once more, by twos and threes, walked up to the Checquers to examine the witnesses, whilst Rench, having re-locked the door, followed with old Lambourne.

There was but little evidence to be given, and the idlers, who were still hanging about, soon spread the news through the village, "as 'ow they'd found it a hactually gentle death, so Ted Parrott warn't a-going up at noight to the churchyard, like as Dolly Lack did."

Jack Rench deposed to losing his float and line, and swore he would "know it agen by that there little alder skewer-like as

he'd a-mended him with." Old Lambourne in his examination, swore he had "never noticed nothin' out o' the way 'bout the lad, except as he'd a bin workin' overtime the last week, a thing as he'd never a-done afore."

The last time he was seen alive was by Ashley, the warrener, about half-past nine o'clock, up by the church, looking, as he told Ashley, for snails for his blackbirds; so that he must have slipped off the camp-sheeting as he was returning home the shortest way, along the path, to the carpenter's shop over which he slept, and as the night was very cloudy and dark, it was all the more likely, "Not as 'ow he ever war in liquor, gents," remarked old Lambourne, "fo' I never seed 'im take more than war good for him, in my life."

Old Lambourne had given the lad a very good character. "An' as to his bein' touched in 'is yed, why, he war a leetle queer, whiles, in his ways—not as it war very much to notice, like. But he'd get a-readin' out o' a big old book o' his'n, an' sometimes,



o' spoutin' to hisself all by heart, whiles he war at his work, an' then he'd get scratchin' about, but you couldn't understand what it war about, though the words war made all right."

One of the jurymen had asked what were his relations with the girl who had committed suicide the week before? And Lambourne had said that "there had bin some talk in the village, but they'd been off-like for some little time now. An' Ted 'ad never said nothing about her, lovin', or otherwise, as he could remember." Lambourne wound up by saying that Ted was "allus a very steady lad, used to sing o' Sundays in the choir, an' 'ud never made no enemies at all with nary a soul in the village."

"Reading out of a big old book," and "spouting to himself, and scratching about," were not considered by the jury to give sufficient grounds for a verdict of temporary insanity; so it was decided that Edward Parrot had met his death by "accidental drowning in the mill pond." And having

delivered themselves of this judgment through their common mouth-piece, the jury rose, and after sundry varied comments and glasses (while the horses were put to), started off home to their several more personally interesting affairs.

So old Lambourne set to work to make Ted a coffin, taking his measure there in the workshop ; and if it was not exactly a labour of love, it was one of honour—for Ted was an orphan, without one relation or friend in all the county—or, indeed, in any county. Moreover, Lambourne owed him three weeks' wage, and Lambourne was an honest man. So he put some extra nails into the wood, and got out one of his best lacquered coffin-plates, which he had been keeping these two years for old Knewstubb, the retired quartermaster, who held out month after month, and hung on like a leech to his gout, which would have killed off anyone but an old annuity sea-dog.

Nor was this all—for in the "extras" which old Lambourne threw in to "Ted's

job," were these words neatly painted on the plate:—

EDWARD · PARROTT  
drowned · in · Stokeley  
Mill · Pool · July · 9 · 18—  
Beat · not · the · bones  
of · the · buried

"Because," as old Lambourne said one morning, when the parson called at the workshop, and noticed the words, "folk as 'as friends what is larned, gets sich-like put on their corfins. An' though 'taint likely as 'is bones 'ud ever be touched, I thought it suitable somehow, 'cos, when I were a-lookin' in Ted's big ole book, I cum across this, with a great black line agen it, an' the date o' poor Dolly's death. An' so, though he doan't know it now, I put it on the lid—not as 'ow I meant it noways an offence to you, sir; it ain't said to nobody in partikler."

How conservative these rustics are in their emotional opinions! Here is old

Lambourne—now very old—who still persists in holding out against the decision arrived at by twelve men of sense, guided by the greater education of the county coroner; and who sticks to it, that “no one ’ud ever know all as to ’ow it cum about, but *he* doan’t b’lieve in accidents a-meetin’ young chaps as doesn’t drink, an’ as ’as no enemies.” And when the neighbours laugh, he only says, “Ah, well-a-day! Ted warn’t the lad to talk much to any one, an’ all as you could ever do with ’im was to jist square ’im up a bit in the rough; he wouldn’t never stand no planing smooth, like most folks. An’ so, every man to ’is mole-trap!” And does he not then get up, and point with shaking finger, for the hundredth time, at his old carpenter’s bench in the corner of the workshop, whereon is sketched the outline of a woman’s figure, life-size, and roughly cut with a chisel, and exactly following Dorothy’s form, as she must have lain on that same bench. But tnen even old Lambourne had not noticed this till after

the inquest was over, and after he had sworn that "they was a bit off lately ;" not until he and a neighbour were lifting the stark and stiffened corpse of the young apprentice into its wooden box, of which the earth-worms alone hold the key.

III.

“RUINS.”

SHE was almost the last woman in the world to write about, and certainly the last woman in the world to be talked about by Evangelicals, whose freight of heavy doctrine sinks their foundering souls, when they try to cross the mid-ocean of sinners' tears.

Neither was she paintable, according to the circumscribed rules of art; yet at one or two brief moments of her life, a sketch might have been taken, hit off upon the wing, which should have been something more than artistic, something almost deeper than pathetic. Had she been of the ordinary size of woman, she might at one time

perhaps, have been a passable-looking village-maiden; though never could her swarthy and irregularly-featured face have allowed the most easily satisfied gazer to call her comely. But far beyond the average height, her defects towered upon one, her faults were magnified, and her imminent figure could not carry them off. Almost a giantess, her six-feet of sin seemed more sinful for very hugeness — while her muscularly-proportioned hips and shoulders inevitably suggested corresponding strength and virulence. Yet she was a woman—masculine only in her great size. Slightest scrutiny showed the woman's form in every line, and slightest sympathy (if indeed any could have been found to give it) perceived little traits, such as only woman has.

Dissolute and abandoned, she had come home to Otterford to rest; and for one other reason more apparent. She had come home to her mother, who lived alone in the old Monastery beside the river; and as there was little of beauty at any time in

her face, so was there little of romance in her life.

It was a ruinous old building—the Otterford Monastery—palatable enough to the artist, but hardly so tasteful to the tenant—rendered prosaic by “studies from the life” of Monastery rats, fat and lusty as their monkish predecessors. “Evening effects” of the river-mists—upon the loins; “bits of colour” that peeled off the damp walls, “cross-lights,” from cobwebs, gleaming ever with beads of dew upon them, and “lines of sight and distance” seen through many a windy cranny of the ancient gables. Half the Monastery chambers were open to the sky, whilst the rest were more or less bare and untenable, with the exception of one large room which was part of the ancient refectory, partitioned off; and some two or three garrets above it, looking out over the river. Here she was born, and here she lived till she was twenty-one—nearly three years ago. She had never, from the first, been the hare-brained, confiding, foolish



girl—like most of the unhappy village-children who emigrate from their mother-village to the new world of streets. There was no tradition of her having ever loved and been betrayed. She had gradually obtained a bad name around the country-side, until at last she had no village-friend left who cared to associate with her.

At fairs and feasts, her old school-fellows, who had sat on the same forms alongside her, and had shared their dinners together in the play-ground afterwards, now passed her with a stare, and almost a shudder, as they turned from their swains and beheld her moving through the crowds of rustics, on many of whose heads she could have leaned her elbows.

Perhaps the less said about her habits the better. She was loose, in a village that was not especially strict, or immaculately virtuous; but where, nevertheless, women were socially thought a little less of, when given to weaknesses only considered worthy of "chaff" in the men—but were held to be

raised again, however, to their former social position when, by a fortuitous accident, all was well that ended well.

At last, nearly three years ago, a week after the September cattle and pleasuring fair was over at Lustlow-in-Arden the news in the village was that she had suddenly "gone off, nobody didn't know where, and nobody didn't care"—except her mother. Moreover, it got about that she had gone away in the night without saying a word to anyone; and in the morning, Frank the Ferryman had found his punt chained up, over on the opposite bank.

Whether her mother "took on" or not, about her truant daughter was only conjectured, upon the score that "we miss bad uns, though they be bad uns." Mrs. Swannell was an old-world dame, old-fashioned as ancient hutches and chattels, who knew nothing modern, and lived in the dreamy past. A woman of old time, who seemed to have lived her *real* life a hundred years ago, and who was now only living out her

ghost-life—walking a little more earth-like than most ghosts, and all day long, instead of only at midnight.

Mother Swannell was as weird and deserted-looking as the huge smokeless chimney-stacks of the Monastery, after the swifts and swallows had taken their autumn flight from them. She had been put in under peculiar circumstances (which were never known, although inquisitively yearned after), by the Arlington family, about a quarter of a century back, just before her daughter was born. Here she had lived ever since, in such retired fashion that even now folks knew less about her than about the newest comer, or the youngest wife brought home to the village from behind the hills. No one had ever seen her husband, or knew his quality. Her few wants did not often take her up the village—the farthest distance she had ever been known to travel since first she came in with her chattels on top of an Arlington waggon, from no one knew where. When she did go up to the little

general store, where everything was to be sold, from smocks to sugar, she meekly waited her turn, never gossiping, but silently counting the candles as they hung in a bunch on the button of the black pepper drawer: then having made known her wants and been served, she meekly stepped forth, and so home again.

The sudden departure of her daughter was a nine days' wonder certainly—although it was rather a customary thing for the more notorious characters in that quiet village to shift their scant pasturage tolerably often, from necessity, if not from inclination. The wonder lay chiefly in this, that she had stayed away so long—such a thing not having been known since the time Jenkyn, seventy years ago, had ended his poaching career of forty seasons, after slaying a watcher up in the Long Ladies' Wood.

When she was gone, no one seemed to notice it so little as her mother. Everything went on—or rather, didn't go on—as before at the Monastery. There was only one

instead of two to boil the hot water for the tea, which the Arlington family took once a year upon the Monastery lawn, when Mrs. Swannell, in an ancient black silk, with invisible fleurs-de-lys, and a peaked boddice that came down half-way to her knees—brought out the hot-water, and poured it into a huge china tureen-tea-pot, which with other necessities had been carried down from the house by the footman.

Time went on. And then “Dobby” (one of four village *flâneurs*, who did odd jobs up village, odd jobs down village, odd jobs out of the village, and odd jobs in at the ferry, with a three day’s rest and a tippie in between), got into more serious disgrace than usual, and went off to do an odd job a little farther away—at a *mill* this time. When he came back again, some months later, he brought the news that he had seen and spoken to Rebecca Swannell, in the county-town in which he had been doing his little odd job; and he recounted to his three *flâneur* - friends, “Taffy,”

"Nutty," and "Pouch," amid the deepest interest and attention, how he was passing a little "jerry-shop," the night his odd job was finished, and hearing a row going on inside, had pushed in, and found "Becky, a-squarin' hup splendid at a tall sodger as big as herself, an' that plucky an' game-some-like ! while some other sodgers, 'longin' to another rigyment, war a-shovin' 'er on, an' 'ollerin' to ole Ruins to go it." Then Dobby enlarged in glowing village terms upon the fight and its termination by the host, "fo' fear o' the p'leece a-comin' round ;" and how the "sodger" who had insulted her, "got a hye like a crab-apple, as he couldn't see out on ;" and how Ruins was applauded for giving the ungallant warrior a rainbow colour not required in the regimental regulation-facings of the crack company to which he belonged, and which would therefore get him guard-roomed and confined to barracks, till Nature chose to paint it out again. And then Dobby narrated how the panting fury

had introduced him to her military admirers as an old chum, and had sat down and drunk with him after the sport. Also, how she told him, "she warn't agoin' to hie back to the old shop again over yonder." And then, in answer to his question as to why they called her "Ruins," she told her old pal that they had christened her "old Ruins" because of the place she was born and bred in—not that she liked it much, though, but then "the boys was rough in their ways when they was friendly."

The poor *flâneurs* as they sat upon the bench outside the Ferry, placidly drinking from their mugs of ale, all agreed that "old Ruins" was a fine and apt title, and that Dobby's importation of the same should be accepted. The quorum also decided that Ruins was improved since she had left, in that she had "fought gëame." "But she *do* drink a devil of a lot," put in Dobby, "so they sez—but then her stomick's long, an' then it doant cost her nothin' as it do us chaps," sighed the reflecting Dobby, as he

fingered his last two coppers. “*She* gets it all stood her for love—that comes along of her bein’ a darned woman”—and then with a “do or die” decision, worthy of a hero, Dobby bawled out to old Frank, who was leading one of William’s fair-haired darlings up to the house—“’Ere, Frank, another mug o’ fower, an’ yer can put your noäse in it, as yer brings it along.”

So this is what got round the village about Becky and her new name—but whether her mother ever heard these particulars of her daughter no one knew; and by some chance neither Dobby, Nutty, Taffy, nor Pouch, ever mentioned them to her personally.

Villagers from time to time brought back news that they had seen Ruins, when doing their business in the county-town; and Pouch, who in his turn went over a year or so later on a like errand to Dobby’s for a month’s job at the big mill-wheel, came back with fuller and clearer accounts of Ruins. How she stuck to “they sodger-



chaps, an' 'ad all her own way with 'em, but he didn't think her looking good fo' much—gettin' a bit weedy an' tumble-down like." Which speech brought down much rude sarcasm, and the cutting insinuation, that perhaps Pouch thought, "*he'd* better go for a sodger in the same rigyment as that cove belonged to as she licked," and the like unfeeling remarks, shutting for the nonce even the enormous mouth of Pouch.

So time went on, and Rebecca Swannell was forgotten, and "old Ruins" was a living character, "carryin' on," eighteen miles off in the county capital.

One evening, as Frank the Ferryman was sitting on his willow-stool looking across the water, and just giving up any more passengers for that night, he saw a tall dark figure coming slowly across the meadow from Pilgrim's Hatch, and advancing with a bundle in its hand up to the landing on the opposite bank. It came up close to the edge, and then Frank saw that it was the figure of a woman, which stood up great and towering

like some nightmare, but silent, too, as a dream. It did not cry "Over," as others did; so Frank waited a little time, and then the figure got lower and lower, until it was only half its former height, and it looked more dim. Then the old man got up off his willow-stool and unwound his punt-chain, and pushed across; and when he had nearly touched the bank, the figure rose up again, weird and huge, and it said, "Well, Frank, doant yer know me? I'm big enough! How be you, since I took yer punt over that night for ye, when ye was too lazy to get up an' 'tend the ferry yourself?"

"Tidy well, thank ye, Becky; ye bin a long time away, but yer come agen—as they all must, lads and lasses both—they all must come at last; an' you've come back."

"Yes, Frank, I s'pose I 'ave—but I'm tired—it's a hot night;" and the looming figure came down the bank, and got into the punt, and sat down beyond the punt-well on the hatch at the end, with her bundle at her feet. She rested with her chin upon her

hands, looking too big and strong to be dead-beat ; but rather only brought to bay and wounded—“tumble-down like,” as Pouch had said. “It’s all the same at the old place, I s’pose, Frank?” “Yes, Becky, it ain’t no different. The Squire’s party’s a-comin’ down to tea a week cum Toosday ; so I ’eared ’em say a’ Sunday in the Ferry.”

“I aint got no money, Frank. It was so hot ; I spent all I had comin’ along, so you must bide till mornin’.” She rose as the punt grounded, and taking up her bundle said, “Good night,” to Frank, and strode off towards the Monastery.

The Monastery was just beyond the Ferry Inn ; a path close to the river ran in front of the Ferry, and then on, through an old stone arch in the wall, to the Lawn, a broad greensward that sloped down to the river. Ruins halted for a moment as if in hesitation, and then strode on faster, keeping, however, close to the edge of the river, as she passed the inn twenty yards off, but not too far away for her commanding and out-of-the-

way figure to be seen and recognised in the waning twilight, by several men who were sitting drinking on the benches outside. "Why, darn me, that's old Ruins come back agen!" exclaimed Nutty; and three or four of the company rose excitedly, and advanced a step or two. "'Ere, Dobby! Pouch! Pouch! come out 'ere, 'ere's darned old Ruins!" shouted Nutty; and Dobby and Pouch appeared, rubbing their mouths with their shirt-sleeves, and hurrying down under the two trimly-cut box-limes, and came near; several men who were in the tap-room, crowded out at the door, and stood, spitting and staring with all their might; and Dobby, in flurried and friendly key, said, "Why, Ruins, ole gal, how be ye? what 'ave ye come home for?"

But Ruins strode on, disinclined to stop or hold any converse with her old acquaintances. They followed, and once she half turned in her stride, looking menacing and determined. "Keep orf—mind yer own business, can't ye? ye might be ashamed o' yerselves—

keep orf;" and she strode on through the groined arch, blotting out in mysterious darkness, for a moment, the green and crystal twilight that defined so clear and sharp the pointed stone. The men were surprised, and fell back with grins and rough curses on either side the arch, looking like knavish supporters to some fair and noble coat of arms, from which a bend sinister had just been removed. Then they returned to their mugs upon the benches, and talked together over the unaccountably unfriendly reception their greeting had met with. "Well, she be a sulky devil; I should think she'd a' bin doin' a suthin' as she ought'nt to; but she need'nt a' turned up so nasty like, fo all that," said Dobby.

The men who had come out to the door to have a look, were unanimously agreed upon the former part of this speech, but put the rest down to feminine idiosyncrasy, which it was impossible for man to fathom.

In a few minutes the curious and wide-mouthed Pouch went round on to the Lawn

to have a peep ; but the great hob-nailed door in the Monastery porch was firmly closed, and only a dim light was visible, behind the blue blind and the geraniums, in one of the half-open casements. "All was quiet, too," so he said, when he came back ; "not a sound excep' the ole clock a' tickin', an no row nor nothin' goin' on."

The men expressed surprise at this, expecting the report of a row, or at least that the old mother would show something of surprise on the unexpected return of the "bad un." This also was discussed, and ultimately dismissed as another of woman's crotchets. And so, confused and unsatisfied in their minds, they gradually got re-arranged in the tap-room beside their mugs, after one or two trifling quarrels in trying to decide contested ownership—each one forgetting how much, but remembering how little he had drunk, "afore Ruins cum by."

So Ruins had returned to her home, and, more singular still, she stayed there. No one ever saw her ; yet she was not ill, for she

walked like a trooper when she arrived. She had evidently altered *one* of her habits: neither by day or night was she seen about, much to the wonder of the villagers in general, and the *flâneurs* in particular.

Mother Swannell went up to the shop, when her little store of tea and sugar had run out, just as usual, only buying double quantity *now*, and also sundry articles to make up for wearing apparel—articles not understood or catalogued in most men's minds, who define everything purchasable for woman's wear by woman as calico. And well it is; for do not the few initiated and unhappy ones who are more wise, to wit, the calico brotherhood of draper's assistants, do they not look sick and sad and lean, from too profound a knowledge of these Delphian mysteries?

Mrs. Swannell, when asked at the shop, (the only place in which she could ever be interviewed), in an innocent way, whether her daughter had not come back—as if it were uncertain—would simply answer, "Yes, she have."

Ten days went by; and still Ruins had

not been presented at the Court of village Inquisitors. Then the Arlingtons came down to their annual tea on the Lawn; but whether they asked after the daughter, was, of course, unknown. Mrs. Swannell appeared as usual in her long-peaked black silk, bearing the same steaming kettle to the same tureen-teapot, just as she had always done ever since her daughter's departure. Although so near, that stalwart handmaid was not beside her. A footman who was leaning up against the sycamore on the edge of the Lawn, counting the jackdaws, thought he saw a face at the end-but-one-casement upstairs; but he didn't see it again, though he watched for it.

A week later brought S. John's Eve round, and with it the village feast. This from time immemorial had always been held up the street at the "Sun and Whalebone;" but it was the wholesome custom, after the victuals had been disposed of, for the women to assemble in the evening upon the Monastery lawn, and there to dance with those of



the men who were still sober enough to stand up unaided, and recognise the difference between their own sweethearts and those of their neighbours.

It was a merry scene that night, upon the lawn of the Monastery. Frank had brought the fiddlers across, who were bravely decked out with bows and ribbon-ends, and their fiddle-heads tied with knots of many-coloured streamers. They had refreshed themselves at the Ferry, and, being refreshed, had unsheathed their weapons, and now upon the Lawn were tuning up for "Packington Pound," and the "Dusty Miller," and the "Quaker's Wife," and many another good old country measure. Everyone from the village was there; and good store, too, of scarce-less-known faces from distant farm and outlying hamlet. There was the young baker from Stow-Maries; and the six ringers, who so often rocked the six belfry foundlings in their cradles, until they went to sleep with their own sweet lullaby; and there were the servants from the Maisonette; and the

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bailiff from Pilgrim's Hatch; and the two watchers in Banstead's Woods, with their velveteen pockets big enough to put all poachers in, and their stolen game as well. And there were the farm-labourers from Truelove's, a farm up on the hills behind; which, O gentle reader (if thou lovest to grub in musty manuscripts, and art a genuine book-worm), thou shalt come upon one day again, when thou art deeply and painfully consulting the second volume of "Domesday Book," and when thou meetest with its sweet name once more, and readeest of the "wapentake" in which it stands, and of its fish-pond—then shalt thou, keeping thy dusty finger upon the place, look up, and throwing back thy long fore-locks, and half shutting thy worn and scholastic eyes, remember that great green hollow near to the house, like unto some huge cock-pit, in which thou sawest the farm-linen blowing in the breeze. And thou shalt know that that hollow must be what remaineth of that same fish-pond thou art reading of. And it

shall delight thee, and thy labours shall reward thee.

This farm, then, of old history, had its modern representatives. But the ill-favoured young miller, and his well-favoured sister were not there ; neither was old Frank, for he was faithful as ever to his willow-stool, and was watching across the water. And past him the river was flowing, flowing on, taking the waving weeds with it as far as their tether ; until, with a bound, it leapt into the great barbel-pool off the Monastery lawn, there to whirl round and round, as it listened to the fiddle and tabor of musician, and the quip and trip and laugh of happy dancer to-night—and on other nights to softer, sadder sounds, unheard by village friend, or even by mother, or tender child, but breathed out in hushed whispers when no one was near from Ferry or Monastery, to be heard only by the river as it left the barbel-pool, to carry them with many another secret from many another riverside-homestead, adown to the heart of the

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great ocean, a hundred miles away. Strange river, did you *always* listen to secrets and never tell them, except to the great Hearer of all secrets? one who has listened to you has said :—

"Nuns within the convent-garden, hearing  
Thee ripple by—  
Have felt a vague regret their heart-strings stirring,  
They scarce knew why.

Did any mortal lips tell thee their sorrow  
Ere Cæsar came?  
Was yesterday like this day? will to-morrow  
Be but the same?"

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To-night, however, what sorrow was there to tell? All the village had come down to the Lawn, decked out in gayest garments. The girls with flushed faces were standing beside their chosen swains in long double row, whilst the married ones, and the less sober men were sitting or lying about. The fiddlers struck up, and Taffy, Dobby, Nutty, and the wide-mouthed Pouch led off the dance from either end, while the rest kept up the

humming country-chorus, to which each village gives its own local application :

“ My mother said  
I never should  
Play with the gipsies  
In Long Ladies’ Wood.”

Over and over again the words were repeated, while feet kept time to the festive measure—Jerry the sweep, with clean attire and radiant countenance bringing in a ubiquitous bass with a wonderful red drum. Fast and furious waxed the sounds of laughter; and fast and furious did the noisy echo of fiddle and tabor beat on the old Monastery walls, till the ivy seemed to tremble again. But the Monastery did not look at all as if it appreciated the merriment this merry evening. In very truth it looked instead, deserted and desolate. There was the porch, but no one was sitting in it; then, behind, was the dark and gloomy hob-nailed door, fast-closed, as if from threatened invasion; then, again—one, two, three! why were *all* the lattices shut-to, except that

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shattered one at the end, hanging away upon one weak hinge, looking from a chamber open to the sky, and from which laughter had departed this hundred years at least? Yes, all were shut, and on this warm midsummer eve, too. It did look deserted. A jackdaw, solitary and alone, came up the chimney, black and sooty, and perched a moment on the top of the stack, but after a weird, discontented, "quor, quor," whirled off and disappeared behind the deserted roof. But it was not more deserted than usual, arithmetically speaking at least. A proof, may be, that emotional impressions are sometimes wrong. For the two women were there still; they had not flitted, as one might have imagined from external appearances. Indeed, far from this, they were expecting the arrival of a guest.

A Stranger was coming to them upon this good Eve of S. John; who if not a harbinger of good tidings, was nevertheless a guest—for poor Ruins was lying pale and very

quiet, up in one of those garrets with the closed lattices, enduring the throes and pains which nature, cruel to be kind, and kind to be cruel, imposes on all those who "multiply sorrow." The laughter was ringing without, though that wretched woman was lying within, in extremity of weakness and misfortune, faint and weary. Outside, the fiddle-strings were twanging madly, urged on by the untiring bows, as if they would break with the excess of boisterous rollicking mirth, rasped and raked on their worn sides. And amid this scuffling merriment, this flourish of trumpet-toned salutation, the Stranger arrived, as guest for life and death, in the Monastery.

Poor Ruins was too sick and worn to greet the Stranger; but her mother received him hospitably, though her face was silent and sad as an Eastern's; and she gave him warmer garments, now that he had come to this cold world. And there were three, where two had been—yet did the Monastery seem more deserted than ever that night.

Three hours later, when the last of the revellers had straggled home, contented, but weary with dancing; when the fiddlers had been ferried over, and were crawling across the misty meadows, still touching their tired strings in the dying distance, as they went slowly up and over the sleeping hills; the midsummer moon arose, and gently bathed the Monastery walls with its soothing rays. A young jackdaw came back and alighted on the chimney-stack, looking, as his head sank into his breast-feathers, as if after all, he would not desert the old place—his first and only home.

Then one of the casements opened, to let in a breath of the sweet night-air. And within the room lay Ruins, who put out from the bed a very large, but, to atone for its size, a very pale hand, which gently opened, asking for the Stranger. And then the Stranger was brought, and put close beside her, and she took him in her arm—that same arm which had dealt such strong and savage blows to the soldier—now tender



and smooth and gentle. But Ruins did not yet *look* upon the Stranger, though she held him close to her—perhaps she was afraid of opening her eyes, for did she not know that he came from that nation against whom she had done battle all her unhappy life? But she held him close to her, and in the peace of sleep that came to all, desolation departed.

With eyelids closed they wandered through  
The only land not seen with tears.

\* \* \* \*

All things have their day—even dogs and tribulation. The Stranger stayed a while at the Monastery, although seeming to suffer from the cold world he had come to. His mother got up and about, and was seen early one evening by Pouch, sitting in the porch with the Stranger in her lap. “As big as Willum’s old case clock a’ready, and a bit more noisy, when he strikes,” was the account which Pouch brought back immediately to his eager friends, who had “minded his mug” for him during his temporary absence.

"E'll be a devil to foight if he grows as he's growed a'ready," was the speculative comment, after a deep reflection, aided by a deeper drink.

"No, he woän't, Pouch," vouchsafed Dobby; "he'll 'ave to fight the corfin-maker afore that, an' he'll get licked out o' time fust round, you see."

"Why?" asked Pouch, with wide mouth stretched wider still. "E'es as good an' as fair a start as you ever 'had, let alone yer fits, an' never knowin' a fayther yersel."

"Why?" repeated Dobby testily, angered at this allusion to his pedigree. "Why, 'cos no one doant know 'why' to 'eaps o' things. 'Why' didn't yer wen goo away, when Betty charmed him? 'Why' do Taffy allus lose a-tossin' when he doant cheat?" and the philosopher laughed at the wit of his own philosophy. "You see, cum Christmas, 'e'll be a stiffy, or Dobby 'll eat his 'at."

Dobby's prophecy bade fair to come true, although it seemed scarcely a prophecy from the lips of such an ignorant yokel. The

Stranger, though large and heavy for his tender age, had something radically and functionally wrong with him.

Although so unnaturally plump and large, he was like some huge and abnormally-developed vegetable at a county Agricultural Show—hypertrophied, and insipid in colour, with shapeless, swollen, and bulging excrescences—hardly recognisable as belonging to the same order as that smaller but more healthy and more compactly-knit brother-vegetable beside it.

As the days went by, Ruins discovered that the Stranger did not notice her. One morning the doctor from Stow Maries, who had been asked to come round from the Ferry Inn (where he was attending one of William's children), looked at him, and informed the two women that the child was blind, and would never see. But, worse than this, it gave indications of being "daft," as well as blind—signs other than the one which Ruins had discovered in the Stranger's never clutching at her offered finger.

The harvest came round. The heavy corn was waiting to lie in the reaper's arms; but even in that glorious summer weather the Stranger was not content to stay in his new quarters. He began to look colder and more pinched, and unable to draw warmth even from the ingle of his mother's lap. Then the grain was gathered in, leaving a halo of glory and a fragrance of departed richness upon every corn land; but the Stranger did not care to partake of it. Then came the in-gathering of the ripened fruit; but all the Stranger could share of it, was to be carried out one early evening, round to the back of the Monastery, into the warm orchard, there to breathe the apple-scented air. Yet he was restless—more restless still, and though unable to sit up by himself now from weakness, made as if he would journey, by the beseeching action of his hands; and he would take no rest, and no heed of anything in that little warm orchard, where the ripened and ruddy apples dropped every now and then with a thud upon the thick turf.

But the Stranger would not be contented, and did not pay any attention to the song of some village-children who were on the other side of the rich-coloured orchard-wall, charming snails, and chanting in a monotonous lullaby:—

“Snail, snail, shut in your horn !  
Father is cold and dead ;  
Mother and grannie are in the back-yard,  
Begging for barley-bread.”

But Ruins shivered, for she felt the first autumn-chill creep over her; and she looked at the Stranger, and saw a greater pallor and faintness on his face, and more anxiety to journey still; so she rose and took him indoors. And next morning she awoke at dawn, at the time when most young things are rising and stirring—when the “Harps,” on feed at early sunrise, upon the golden shoals of tropic seas, draw behind them on the wet sands at low-tide their coloured shells, in which the sounds or sea-waves linger. But at dawn, when most young creatures cry for food, the Stranger’s

hand, which had never clutched his mother's yearning finger, was clenched now in stern resolution to refuse any more sustenance. And Ruins held him to her, with eyes shut, as when at first he came to her, and she said, "He felt the chill last night, mother." But her mother answered not, only went about, opening all the doors, and all her oaken hutches and presses, that there might be no torture to the poor little soul, nor hindrance to its unknown journeying; and a few hours later, the Stranger left the Monastery as he had come—alone.

Ruins bade him farewell in the same room that he came to her in first, when he arrived on that merry S. John's Eve. Her mother who had received him so hospitably and had clad him with new garments, now with her face grave as an Eastern's, made the preparations for his departure. She put flowers into his hand as all country-side folk are wont to do when we take our leave of them; and she would see him safely along some part of his journey, and so she went

with him up the village street, and she was loth to leave him even then, as she looked a farewell at the edge of that dark hold into which his earthly effects were being lowered, to be unpacked one time in a form unrecognisable in their beauty, in a land of sunshine beyond the sea.

\* \* \* \*

So Dobby was right in his prophecy, and his hat was not in jeopardy so long as Christmas, and it remains uneaten to this day.

\* \* \* \*

For awhile Ruins kept so secluded, that when her mother went up to the shop, the mistress asked cautiously, almost coaxingly, "if her daughter had left?" "No, she haven't," was the only reply obtained from Mrs. Swan-nell. So that either Ruins must have been extra busy with household occupation, or ill. Gradually, however, she began to come outside the porch; and by the beginning of November, when the lowering and watery-looking clouds told of the breaking up of

the weather, she was often seen walking at evening, as far as the edge of the Lawn, or sometimes on the other side of the rails, down the meadows beside the stream, beyond the grass-cyot.

“She be gettin’ restless agen,” said Dobby one evening, as he was being ferried over by old Frank, on his return from some job out of the village, “See ’er there, down the bank, by they sedges—she’d like a bridge for her there *I* know, now.” Frank, silent as usual, at length remarked, “They all comes back ; they allus must come back at last.” Dobby laughed as he got out of the punt and said “Good-night,” applying Frank’s words to his own escapades, which had taken him from time to time over to the county town, and to his frequent returns, like the often quoted bad half-penny.

Yes ! Ruins was getting restless, but not more sociable. She had not been up village since she had come back ; and she had never been nearer any of her neighbours than on the night before the Stranger left,



when she had heard the children charming the snails away, on the other side of the high orchard wall. One evening she said suddenly to her mother—"Mother, I wants to go to hell! hell's betterer than this, an' I can't, *can't* bide it—my boy couldn't bide it—that's why he went—I'll kill myself—" as she said this, she leaned forward, looking "tumble-down-like," as she had in the punt, and she gazed at her mother with a strange quiet determination in her eyes.

"Tut, Becky, what be talkin' about: will ye frit me daft, child? I tell ye wot, if ye knowed wot I does about that sort o' thing you'd—I'd rayther far I never see ye agen, or knowed where ye was—the job's bad enough now—" but Ruins had risen, and had opened the great hob-nailed door. It had been raining all day, but now the rain had stopped for awhile; the clouds were driving over the swaying elms; the boughs restful for one minute, and then again surging together to and fro, high above their creaking and groaning trunks. Ruins

was standing blocking up the entrance with her huge tower of pain. A dim light, like a trembling Will o' the Wisp, was creeping along the Lawn.

It was Frank coming across to his garret-bed. Ruins went out to him and they stood talking.

"It be wonderful rough to-night, Becky," said Frank; "they've 'ad a deal o' rain up country; the seven springs is a bubblin' and boilin' now, *I* know; we'll get the water down to-morrow, an' all next day too. Plenty of eels—I've been up with Maister Willum, and we've put they eel-pots down, and we found this pëarch in one, as 'ad been left in, an' I've brought it over for yer supper, it's dainty-like w'en one aint pëart. We see three widgeon, and Maister Wilum's marked 'em for the mornin'. The rymers and paddles is all pulled up at the Red Holt Weir, an' they've drawn the mills all the way along, an' there'll be a flood cum mornin'. There's a deal o' wet to fall yet; and 'night-rains makes drowned

fens ;'”—and Frank peered in the darkness across the water, and then said, “Good-night, Becky, an’ ere’s the fish,” and sham-bled off with his dim horn-lantern to his rat-ridden pallet in that weird old Monastery garret.

Next morning, Frank was up early to bale out the rain which had fallen into the boats. He crawled over the moist and yielding turf, and got his wooden scoop out of the rush-barn, and then went down to the horse-boat, but the little punt was missing; and looking in the dreary early morning he could not see it on the opposite side—there was the post leaning up out of the mist, getting fainter and fainter nearer the ground, but no punt was chained to it.

The water was riding down in silent yet terrible strength, more than bank high, flooding the Monastery lawn, and shining in silver sheets through the mist upon the meadows, on towards the dim-seen Pilgrim’s Hatch.

Some inexperienced hand had tried to

cross in the night, and, not able to stem the rising stream, had got carried down to the quiet pool opposite the grass-eyot, and had left the punt there for Frank to bring back.

So Frank crossed the Monastery lawn, and went down the bank to the grass-eyot—but it was not there. Then he walked on through the mist and sodden grass, until he came to the backwater, and then he saw his punt, caught up in some willows, and half drawn under, but out of reach. He could see into the punt—the punt-pole was not there, but he saw a bundle instead, and Frank’s face grew full of meaning, and he went away. And then “Maister Willum” came down with him in a skiff; and as they neared the backwater they saw the punt-pole sticking up out of the water. A river beacon and the words, *marked Wreck*, came to William’s mind.


And half-an-hour later, they punted up with the skiff in tow, and a colossal, tumbled figure lying stretched out at long

length in the head of the punt, covered over with a shawl, which fell in wet folds over every limb. Looking at it in that dreary early morning, and at the sodden bundle at its feet, Frank said, "They all comes back ; the river's the path fo' sick folk, and they allus must come back."

IV.

"NOBES'S TOMB."

EVERYBODY has heard, at some time or other, in our part of the country, of Nobes's Tomb, but no one knows much about what it is ; it being variously described, at one time, as a field ; at another, as a copse ; but more often as a farm or cottage. The parson, who was once up there, eighteen years ago, says it is a small but very ancient farmhouse, lying back behind the hills, difficult to find, and evidently not ecclesiastical in origin. Frank, the old ferryman, when talking as was his wont on subjects archaic, had an expression, that such and such a thing was "nothing to nobody now-a-days, like Nobes's Tomb ;" but any further inquiries of the reticent Charon produced, as



he would have put it, "nothing to nobody," also. The ubiquitous postman, who walked twenty-five miles every day of his life except Sundays, "'ad 'eerd tell on it, but 'ad never bin there, for as to takin' a letter up over them 'ills, why no one wouldn't want letters, and no one wouldn't get no letters as lived a five-mile tramp off his beat; for postal regilations, bad as they was, hadn't come to that; why, the extry penny a letter for going to the Hall Farm was bad enough." Strange to say, the village scapegraces knew most about Nobes's Tomb. Dobby especially would leer on being questioned, and remark; "Ah, you means Old Hide-in-the-Pot's Crib;" and then, partially explaining himself, would go on to say that "the Tomb as you means is up over the hills, going for Owlesbury, an' it aint no tomb at all, it's an old ancient cottage, built wonderful strong, down in an holler, very lone like, an' a standin' three miles, as the bird flies, orf the nearest beer-house—an' that's the Tomb."

"But who is 'Hide-in-the-Pot?' and what does he do up there?"

"Well, yer see 'ees a sort o' farm-bailiff like, in a small way, that's 'ow 'ee describes 'isself; but 'e's really nuthin' but a farm-labourer, as lives at the Tomb, and works for Tommy Negus over at the Beech Farm; but 'e's got a gëame as pays better nor that any day, an' so we calls 'im old Hide-in-the-Pot."

A subsequent accident discovered for us the aptness and veracity of this pseudonym; but at present it is enough to state that the origin of this implicative appellation was the "gëame" which paid better in the pot than elsewhere, and probably afforded greater excitement both in the getting and keeping, than the weekly pittance of ten shillings, certain as Sundays in their arrival.

All this was interesting, but unsatisfactory—to know a little, but not to know more and to discover after patient and long continued inquiry no history for the name of a place so suggestive, was tantalising.



One thing was plain—extracting information from the majority of the older villagers, was a task about as difficult as stubbing up a row of elms, but without the same assured though long delayed result.

The name of Nobes was on no lichen-covered headstone. The name of Nobes was to be found on no mural tablet either upon the walls of Water-Stokeley old Church, or those of her neighbour villages.

The Early-English glass in the grand old Norman windows, with their saw-tooth mouldings, threw many a splash of colour upon the pavement in the chancel of Stow-Maries' Church; but, looking up at the windows, one saw no knight in armour who kneeled with his lady beneath the name or motto of Nobes. From the pavement in the long aisle, the faces looked up from the ancient brasses with expressionless placidity, and seemed calmly and peacefully to whisper from out five hundred years:—

“Reader, here is not the family-vault of Nobes. I am Unton de la Beche.” Or,

"Reader, I am William Wrangdyke, sometime Captain in his Majesty's forces." Or, "I am Knelm Cheseldyn, sometime priest of this parish."

No! here was not the resting place of Nobes. Clambering up the belfry, among the six ringers of centuries of birth, and love, and death—disturbing birds that wheeled out of the four broad-boarded belfry windows; disturbing bats that shook themselves into momentary consciousness, and then swung off again to sleep; disturbing small mice that trembled along the mighty beams—we crawled between the sleeping giants. We crept from bell to bell, feeling as small and weak as the little mice, when we had completed the circuit of the big tenor, around which we read how that Mentor of bell-founders,

+ ABRAHAM + RUDHALL + MAYDE + ME +

Brave old Bell! He who has rung you for half a century, says you're a terrible big tenor, and recounts how :—

“Three times run,  
And three times cast,  
Stow Big Bell was hung at last.”

But this was in 1634, as the raised metal letters which run round your iron girdle tell.

But, O big and sleeping tenor, you tell nothing of Nobes, though once, peradventure, you rang out loudest and farthest when first he led, in brave attire, Mistress Nobes to her new home. And you other five sleepers, you five lesser bell-brethren with the inscriptions on your aged iron collars; you, Clement, and you, Douce, and you, Hautector and Gabriel, you tell, not one of you, that “Master Nobes gave me.” And you, smaller, younger Austin, were not yet born from the fiery foundry where bells begin to talk. Here, then, the iron tongues have no tale to tell of Nobes.

It was of little more use interrogating the pious but provokingly deaf old sexton, who insisted, past all persuasion, in stating that, “Job’s tomb was in the land of Uz;” and then with a wrinkled face, as if he

thought we were joking with him, finishing up with a description of the personal and bucolic effects possessed at his decease by the Patriarch, whom he affected to think we inquired after; to wit;—"Fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand she-asses."

This last was a climax too terrible for any antiquarian researcher. Feeling unsuccessful in the highest degree, and expressing our thanks in suitable pantomime for the biblical but unasked-for information, we sadly went our way.

Being at a subsequent period in the county town, we inquired of a bookseller, who was the antiquarian food-finder of the district, if there was a family in the county of the name of Nobes. Visitations were ransacked, but among families long since extinct, once famed beyond the limit of shire or shore, we found not the name of Nobes. That no one of the Nobes family ever held office of any description in the county was certain, for records would have shown this;

still, that a certain Nobes did at one time live and possess a name either famous or notorious, was evident, if only from the fact of "Nobes's Tomb" having become a local proverb.

Frank the Ferryman was ever uncommunicative, and time of communication was now past. Poor Frank was gone, not to the Union at Stow-Sutton, but to the larger, happier Union, where no world-worn sorrowers, paupers in sympathy and kindness, seeking a haven of rest, are ever denied admission, hailing though they may from never so distant a parish.

Frank's last days had been days of quiet repose, befitting his failing strength. His son had taken to the ferry work, and after a time to the little cottage which stands behind the "Sun and Whalebone," at the top of the village, on the road to Lustlow-in-Arden—a little two-roomed cottage-hovel, that shared its jasmine tree, its chimney, its rain-butt and its roof, with a brother cottage against which it had leaned in lazy uncon-

sciousness for the last hundred years. Here Frank, if he had not absolute comfort, had his son, who, strange to say, had upset all the village doctrine and philosophy by turning from the quondam "out and out radical," (which by the way all the virtuous inhabitants took care he should not forget he had been) into a sober, steady puntsman. It was a goodly sight to see old Frank on Sunday evenings, in clean green smock—a better one than that which the early-rising bargee had stolen—slowly crawling down the village street to the ferry. Leaning upon his ground-ash stick, he would halt every few yards to gain a breath, and take a look round on the scenes he knew so well: then he would totter on, and at last reach his old willow stool, which had been piously preserved in spite of several attempts to remove it. Here, where he had watched and waited so many weary years, would he sit and gaze with dimming vision at his son, the younger and "pëarter hand," as he punted the villagers to and fro.

Then, when the long shadows began to fade in the waning light, Frank would rise and slowly crawl home again up the street, stopping to look back awhile at the blaze of apple blossom in the garden of the cottage next to the Post Office, where once he had lived. Perhaps, through his dim old eyes, he saw the petals dropping one by one. Perhaps he saw the boughs beginning to bend, laden with the weight of rich red fruit, which turned its sunny side towards him. Perhaps he heard the dead ripe apples falling, falling, one by one, at the decree of a chilly autumn wind; and may be he looked again, and saw the ground brown with the rotten and worm-riddled fruit, awaiting the hand of a gatherer that might not come; and so the veteran of the village ferry would get him home.

It was on such a Sunday evening, one May time, after Frank had got back to the cottage, and into the corner of his settle, that his head began to droop as if the old man were dozing; and when his son spoke to him,

he did not reply, but leaning upon his stick, he stretched out his hand, as a blind man, groping for what he does not fear to touch. And then in the growing darkness and silence, the young strong hand caught the thin, weak fingers of the pilgrim puntsman, but could not catch or call back the spirit which had so gently pushed off and crossed from Earth to Heaven.

The daisies which had been wont to open and shut so regularly once a day, for thirty-five seasons in that shady corner near the Arlington vault, must remember the morning when they shut their eyes, though the sun was yet but two hours high, as the sexton stripped their bed of turf, and rolling it up awhile spread it out once more—but this time upon a higher mound: they must remember how they laid their heads among the green blades of grass, until the sun had slowly swept across the blue distance, and left the whispering air full of tears. Perhaps they have forgotten, for they looked very peaceful that time we stood and read above



them upon a headstone which had been erected by an unknown hand:—

MINE + OWN + WILL + I + BRING + AGAIN  
AS + I + DID + SOMETIME  
FROM + THE + DEEP + OF + THE + SEA.

\* \* \* \*

There is in the village an “old inhabitant,” who, though unable to read or write, is endowed by his neighbours with a reputation for knowledge which many a college man would gladly possess.

George Thickens is no geologist, in the scientific sense of the term, but eminently so in the practical application. Where George Thickens sinks a well, water is sure to be found at the bottom. When the clever young surveyor came over to drain and lay out the gardens up at the Hall, George’s plans, sketched out with chalk upon a slate, proved in their carrying out to be far better, both as to the drainage and the general landscape-effects of the flower-

beds. The pond in the Home-field never held water, except in rainy weather, until George put spade in it. It is a local saying that, "where George has a try, the ponds won't dry." George can plan, and George can carry out, which two things do not always come together. It was not till George reformed the sanitary affairs at our end of the village, by planning a better contrivance than the open drain which was poisoning us daily, that, having a personal interest in the exciting nuisance, we became aware, along with its removal, of George's merits. It was while he was working this reformation that our acquaintanceship began. The gentry, to whom George was very well known, called him a "a character"—they were really only saying that this rugged piece of practicality had watched Nature as she had shewn herself in Water-Stokeley for the last seventy years. Viewed in some lights, George certainly was "a character;" he looked it as he stood there, holding the guide-line with which he was marking out

a trench ; his quiet grey eye looking along the cord, and blinking, from time to time, in the hot July sun, like an aged terrier's when he wishes to be thought asleep. His movements were slow, but never needless : deliberation and fulfilment marked every action. He would pause and have a blink, but work was forwarded ; and " something accomplished, something done," chiefly followed that preliminary blink. George worked in a blue shirt, over which a broad leathern letter X sprawled, starting at the lower extremity from a masterly pair of corduroys, which appeared to do duty for trousers and waistcoat all in one. They suggested the idea that though to-day they had not accomplished the feat, yet that they had progressed an inch or two since yesterday, and that by to-morrow, or next day at latest, they would successfully mount to the summit of George's broad shoulders, and from that eminence would triumphantly dispense with leather hoists altogether.

To call George's boots colossal would be

a weak and pigmy-graphical description. That George had, in such boots as these, once walked from Salisbury, a distance of fifty miles, in one day, accounted for his pastoral rather than military gait; but as he remarks, "Ye wants stout boots fo' the roads 'ereabouts, an' nails—not tacks, but *nails* as *is* nails—what they tires waggon with." On which principle, we humbly suggest that he must tire his feet also; to which he stolidly remarks, blinking all the while, "No, sir, I doän't—not as 'ow I couldn't; but I goes to an' fro awhile Billy Nobottle's a makin' of 'em, an' I sees as I 'as my two pounds o' nails 'ammered in proper, an' into a tidy bit o' hide, too."

George has such boots on now, and they leave in the hot and dusty road a row of little pits which the languid wind will not cover till she rises at sunset. George leaves his work for a few moments on seeing us, and pulls a lock of his iron-grey hair, which, communicating in some invisible

manner with his left eyelid, immediately closes it.

"Mornin,' sir ; so yer aint bin up agin to ole Scratch-o'-me-Nob ?"

"No, George ; but who told you I was up there last week ?"

"Nobody didn't, sir." Here the hair-trigger again drops the eyelid. "Nobody didn't ; but I seed you as I were a-comin' back from Squire Littlechild's over at Hawkrige, as I'd bin to see about a pond as 'ee wants digged fo' 'im."

"Well, but George, the road from Hawkrige doesn't run near Scratch-o'-me-Nob Hill."

"No, sir, that's right, nor it doän't ; but yer sees Scratch-o'-me-Nob from it, just afore the road turns off from Cold Oak, an' from there it's nigh a mile, more nor less, as the crow flies, going home, an' that's weer I seed ye. Beg parding, but yer were a standin' by the pole-staff at the end o' the ridge, an' there yer laid yerself down, right in the sun on the hill-side, an' I says to my-

self, the genelman aint got the proper view yet, for 'ee doänt see Buckenham Clumps, nor Trawley Bottom, nor the Shepherd's Rest, away over Staddlestone Down, from where he be a-bidin' now."

"Well, George, you've good eyesight. I am glad that I wasn't doing anything that I oughtn't to do—pulling up that staff, for instance. I thought up there I was quite alone with the view and my own thoughts."

"That's were we never is, beggin' yer parding, sir;" but the eyelid, influenced again by capillary attraction, here dropped, effectually concealing the old man's expression. "That there were a smart bit o' work, the day as the devil turned the Scratch-o'-me-Nob orf his share, as 'eed a-ploughed along all up the Vale. Warn't it, sir?"

"Well, George, if it is true that the devil did do it, but I have my doubts on the subject."

"Well, yer see, sir, fo' the matter o' that, I aint 'ad no edication, so it aint fo' the likes o' such folk as I for to have 'pinions; but

that's wat they ses. 'Ow 'ee ploughed up all along the Vale from the West country, an' then when 'eed cum to the end o' 'is furrow, 'ow 'ee turned the Scratch-o'-me-Nob orf his share. If things was to be done twice, all folks' folk 'ud be wise."

"By the way, George, have you ever heard of Nobes's Tomb? though of course you've heard of it; but have you ever been there? could you tell me the way there?"

"Nobes's Tomb, you means, a goin' over for Owlesbury."

"Yes, somewhere out that way."

"Well, sir, I were by there many's the years ago. There's an ancient farm there, but I doän't know who bides there now. Ole Jethro —." Here much blinking was required to look far into the past, but it cleared the old man's vision, and he continued, "Ole Jethro Whitmee used to bide there one time, but that war when I war a lad, fifty years ago, an' more nor that a smart bit. It's a lonesome sort of place; my missus come from out that way, but I

doän't think as she'd know who bides there, for my missus doänt know nothin' as I doänt know."

"But there's a Tomb there, George—Why is it called Nobes's Tomb?"

"Well, sir, there was an ancient sort of a tomb there w'en I war a lad, but I doänt know if 'ee stands now. I didn't notice it when I come by last. Yer see, sir, it aint on the road to nowhere."

"How do you get there, George, from here?"

"Well, sir, beggin yer parding, but yer wouldn't never find it. If I was to set out for to go, I should go up over What-Call-Hill, an' thro' the wood, and then down in the bottom t'other side, and then up agen, an' then right 'cross country—for there aint no roads as 'ull take yer nigh; but that way, if yer goes straight and walks a smartish pace, it aint more nor five mile, more nor less."

Georges manner here becomes very deferential and blinking.



“Beg parding, sir ; if so be as yer didn’t mind, I’d make so bold as to walk over with yer some Sunday arfternoon, for to shew yer the way : not as I be now, sir, for I aint fit for to walk alongside a genelman, but some Sunday arfternoon, when I got my clothes on.”

This invitation was not to be lost, for apart from visionary trespassings, rather pleasant than otherwise, with George, who was known to everybody, here was the chance of a companion who had the discovery-faculty well developed within him, and who would be an excellent medium between all that was to be found at the Tomb, and the only too probable dissembling of Hide-in-the-Pot.

One Sunday afternoon, therefore, we presented ourselves by appointment at George’s garden-gate. George was contemplating China-asters. He was dressed in an entire suit of solemn black, crowned by an impressive and towering top-hat, whose brim and build recalled the time when cricket was

a novelty, and whose colour, though at first suggesting a reflection of the green privet hedge, shewed itself, upon maturer inspection, to be natural to the green old age of the venerable wearer.

We lifted the latch and entered this perfection of an old-fashioned pleasaunce, George turning and shutting his left eye as usual, by means of the lock of hair which appeared from beneath the venerable hat. It was impossible not to observe, that, conscious of the habit which he had of pulling his hair at the commencement and termination of every sentence, George had, on assuming his state helmet, been careful to draw down the required amount—foreseeing that "every little makes a mickle," and that even such a hat as his could not withstand the multitudinous tugs at the brim, which it would otherwise assuredly suffer. His large and full waistcoat gaped open after six buttons had done their duty, leaving their two inferior brethren to freely rise and fall at

such time as George might wish to take his ease in his high-backed Windsor-chair opposite the settle; not that he was burly in body, but rather that his muscles of respiration were extra powerful to meet the requirements of so capacious a chest.

Of course George despised the new-fangled way of wearing a watch in the waistcoat pocket. He preferred — standing firmly upon his left leg and inclining to that side—to lift up half his waistcoat (apparently by a series of facial wrinklins and grunts), to draw forth cautiously, and with steady pull, first of all about a foot of black ribbon, and then—like a bucket emerging at length from a well—his watch. With George, looking at his watch was a solemn affair. This same case-watch, “which was always right by the church,” (the church-clock was never right at all), was endowed with what George was pleased to call “a good clack to him.” Kitchen-clocks have been known to tick louder, especially in that preliminary hurly-burly, in which they

indulge before striking; but over any ordinary degenerate kitchen-clock of our day, George's watch maintains its supremacy for "a good clack."

We have a short conversation upon the varied and splendid collection of asters, which appear to be a speciality with George, who—doubtless remembering the long ago, when German-asters were all the rage—always in calls these later children of the aster family, "juryman-asters."

"The ladies likes juryman-asters—look-ye, them sorts, only these is bigger nor they likes."

"Do they, George? Well, they make a beautiful colour in the garden; they ought to like them."

"No, sir, an' beggin' your parding; in their bonnets I means: did yer see the squire's old lady visitors in the Hawkridge pew in church, this mornin'? Well, they 'ad juryman-asters in their bonnets—but lookee, sir, it be five o'clock, an' if we be goin', beggin' yer parding, we'll be orf together."

The saying is a wise one—"if you want a horse, try him." George's appearance at work and in his garden did not indicate active locomotion; but George when he was fairly on the road, and his pace was found, was a thing not to be forgotten. To this day it is a mystery to us, whether this walk was a supreme effort to shew what seventy ripe years could do against a younger pedestrian, or whether it was prompted by a feeling that his boots were on their mettle (which they most assuredly were) after my previous uncomplimentary comments. Probably it was a sense of chivalry towards the boots; for so emphatically and vigorously did they stamp the rugged ground, that the two pounds of nails became strikingly apparent—the only question being, by what force within the bowed frame of the old man, were such ponderous road-crushers wielded?

At the commencement of the journey, the way lay up What-Call-Hill, very short, but very steep, and steeper than ever this hot

afternoon in early August. Arrived at the top, before entering the wood that ran along the ridge for half-a-mile, George ordered a halt. "When you gets up a-top of a hill, allus stop to 'ave a blow an' a look round. Lookee, ye'll allus see a summat. There, now, yer sees that copper-beech as stands out in the bottom, there, in the middle of the wood, where it lies in the head o' the valley? Well that's Sammy's Beech, 'cos that's where Sammy Smallbone, as were gran'-feyther to our Smallbone the keeper, an' feyther to Smallbone the shepherd, got a clout o' the 'ed as did for 'im, under that there tree, an' ee warn't found till next hay time, when there cum a great storm an' washed a runnel 'longside the roots, an' there were Sammy's skull with a hole in it. An' 'ow we knowed it, was by his dog as war with 'im, and there war the collar with our Squire's name on't; an' we 'eard say as 'ow the ole clumber's bones was mixed up like with 'is maister's. So they just dug the grave agen there under the tree, an' that beech as

yer see, is allus in leaf a fortnight afore the others."

After this cheerful anecdote we start afresh, George leading through the wood, and taking in everything with his critical grey eye. "Ye see them logs, sir; gentry can't wait now-a-days for undergrowth to have a chance to grow, they must allus be a-cuttin' and' a-cuttin', till there ain't no chance fo' nothin.' This ain't timber—but then, lookee, the gentry warnts their money quick, but timber won't be hurried, not fo' nobody, an' so the trees ain't thinned, year in an' year out, as they ought to be, but gets all cut down together; and then the gentry comes and ses, 'why, dom this land! there ain't no timber on it,' an' they must allus be a plantin' an' a-stockin', or a-doin' summat. An' then, in a year or two, afore the young trees is 'arf up, they must fall to a-fellin' agen, an' so they goes on; but that ain't the way to make timber, nor money either. Hurry-scurry! it's all hurry-scurry with folks now-a-days, allus a-doin' somethin'—but

beeches don't grow no quicker nor they did when folks used to wait an' pray reg'lar a Sundays fo' the kindly fruits of the earth, as they might harvest them in their due season. That's w'at I calls old-fashioned farmin', an' it paid a deal sight better nor a-hurryin' an' a-scurryin' over the land with new-fangled drills an' machines w'ot does everything, as well as cuttin' orf chap's fingers as doän't know how to guide 'em. Not but some machines 'as their use—some's better nor others, but farmin' ain't no farmin' when machines mean hurry-scurry grab-all; lookee, sir, it's only a savin' at the spigot, to spend at the bung."

George's moral reflections upon our age of hurry-scurry rather increased than diminished the pace—which was becoming (considering the nature of the ground) hot in the extreme. A careless allusion to the unevenness of the turnip-field through which we were hurrying, and a carefully worded fear lest George's feet might suffer, drew forth the usual apologetic application to the



forelock ; and likewise (if old George's back told anything) a serene but sarcastic smile, as he observed that his boots "war made for turmut-trudgin' an' such like ;" and also, "that it warn't 'arf so heavy walking now as at first-ploughin' time, when there were such a wonderful power o' rain a-fallin'."

A subsequent field proved that this side of the country could afford still more hummocky specimens of the neozoic age. We were now down in the bottom, and had another hill to climb. Starting at a joyful pace up this incline, George remarked that as yon "Tomb war five mile, more nor less, and five mile, more nor less, back home, we mustn't lazy along the way, not if we was to do the job afore sundown."

The "job" proved to be five miles and very much more, as it is needless to state was also the return journey — although George did, in narrating the affair some time after, stand by his statement, "that it war five mile, more nor less ;" and as there were no milestones, it was hopeless to confute this

vague statement. Where time and season were concerned, George might be safely trusted—distance was to him but the mere mileage of imagination.

"There, sir, that there field's called the Devil's Fiddle, an' it's just like a fiddle, aint it? ah, it's bin ploughed an' harrerred, an' ploughed an' harrerred, but nuthin' 'll ever grow there but grass, an' folks won't never cross it at night. The old path to Owlesbury ran across it once in a time, but it's turned nowadays, and goes round by that spinney. They ses as yer can 'ear a fiddle a-playin' on certain nights o' the year, but ye never 'ears another, for yer goes stone deaf an' looney like, tho' I doän't think, beggin' yer parding sir, as if *you* was to 'ear it, as 'ow *you'd* go deaf. It comes o' folk gettin' frit at what they döan't understand; it's a little thing as puts their beards in a daze."

We are on the top of the ridge at last, with a broad table-land before us, sloping away towards the westing sun. Behind us, down in the bottom, a whitened farm-road

follows the winding valley. The land lies very quiet, no one is to be seen about; but it is not desolate-looking, it is only very peaceful. There is rest in that winding, waggonless road; there is rest in the standing woods that sweep away over the dipping land; there is rest in the distant range of downs that lie looking sunward, shoulder to shoulder, like reclining giants.

George is examining some wheat-ears which are already bound by their golden throats into yellow sheaves, that stretch away, row after row, along the table-land. With his stick held under his arm, he sorts the heavy ears between his broad and hard human mill-stones, and blowing away the husks he critically considers the quality and number of quarters to the acre.

George vouchsafes nothing; but his face wrinkles, and becomes a study, as he crushes the corn-grains between his strong white teeth, and his grey eyes look out from beneath their shaggy brows along the line of leaning sheaves.

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The Fiery King of the corn-field, shedding a ray on every separate shock, has one also for old George's bronzed and ripened face. George cannot see his own face, but he can enjoy the glory of the summer completeness, and in his own way does so, for he turns and pulls his hair, with the inevitable result, and says, "it does yer good, sir, to have a blow, and a look about." We skirt the corn-field, and turning after a time into another wood, strike a path—or rather George does—as straight as broad oak-boles, and clumps of underwood and brush more than thirty feet thick, will allow us. As for the smaller brake and bramble, we go or rather tear through it somehow, the exact "how," being a feat difficult of description. Briar and thorny spine break down before George's mammoth tread; and the sound of the crackling branches which have fallen in winter-storms, remind one of the trampling clamour of a herd of stampeding oxen. Now and again some thorny portion of a bramble makes itself sensibly as well as

audibly felt by the invading leg. Does George feel these insinuations also? Surely it cannot be his cast-iron broadcloth? it must be his skin, which has such a marvellously protective quality?

His boots at least are useful now, and the "turmot" is forgotten, while meditation is directed to the "sich like," for which they were more especially constructed. With two thorns and a portion of a third in our own sensitive sole, we wonder if it be possible to make boots without five heavy hob-nails to every square inch, yet warranted to withstand the casual entry of a like number of woody needles into that space.

The untiring George neither walks, nor scrambles, nor tumbles, through these thorny barriers of grief and vexation of soul; but with a preliminary pat of his stick on the more refractory of snares at rare intervals, he rolls irresistibly through all and everything. The thought suggests itself that the broad-cloth may suffer, but nearer inspection (when at last we have a chance

to make it), proves it to be our theories, we were almost going to say our hopes, and not his garments which are torn to shreds.

The high hat is still to the fore, and bravely encounters and promptly engages several festoons of hanging undergrowth, but after the first shock it rallies and rides out of action upon George's indomitable head, intact and triumphant. His battle-hat is carefully and systematically brushed up the wrong way fifty-two times in the year by his frugal spouse, so no damage is received. A few defiant and bristling beaver-spikes impale certain burrs and retain them prisoners, but these may fairly be viewed as trophies of war.

At last we are out in the open again, and making our way round a field of standing barley. The rustling of the ears and the dry and yellow straw tell that it is ripe for cutting, but fields are many and harvesters, nowadays, are few and fractious, so this must wait awhile for the c ming cradle-scythe. We have had a wet and cold spring,

and barley-sowing was backward; indeed, that slovenly monoptic, Mr. Samuel Skindle, did not get his barley into the Bole-Burrow land, till the little May mummers had been round, dressed up in flowery attire, and their grandmothers' bonnets, wishing us a

"A j'yous day,  
A j'yous day on this the First of May!"

George, who has a saw, if not a rhyme, for everything, says; "Looke, sir, beg parding, but Samuel warn't so far wrong, arfter all, fo'

"When the Ellum leaf be as big as a mouse's ear,  
Then to sow barley there beänt no fear;  
When the Ellum leaf be as big as a ox's eye,  
Then ses I, 'Hie, boys, Hie!'"

"And this year we was past the middle o' April, and 'cept in low bushes, the ellums didn't show no signs o' leafin' no ways."

What a change since then! And what a change there will be a fortnight later—a

change, which looking at you now, O great field, brings somewhat of sadness with it; when your golden-headed barley-battalions shall lie, mown down by the scythes and reaping-hooks that are hanging up this evening in the barn; when the wide-curving wind-rows shall lie across the golden stubble, repeating into the burning distance Hogarth's line of beauty: and when, last of all, the great harvest-wain, with "GOD SPEED THE PLOUGH," painted in large letters across its head-board, shall only creep in and out, until at eventide naught will remain but the silence of the empty acres. To-night the barley stands asleep and quiet, except where now and then a few rippling ears wave in running line, and there is heard the harsh "crex, crex," of a foraging corncrake, which pushes beneath, deeper and deeper into the golden covert, frightened at the intrusion of a hated race.

A whitethroat, singing upon the wing, jerks out of the wood-side, and goes skimming and dipping over the barley-beards in



wild and merry mood. His note may mean many things. This evening he seems to say

“Sweet, sweet is the soft and sunny weather ;  
Sweet, sweet is the soft and sunny weather !”

In the next field, the corn is already cut, except in corners and places where some broad oak, spreading far and wide, has kept the crops back. These patches, to be ripened only by the westering sun, a fortnight later, when all the rest has been cut and carried, will furnish the sheaves for the last great lumbering wain, dragged home across the stubble by every horse on the farm, pressing the sides of every gate, groaning up-hill, and tottering down, guarded by an excited body of chaunting harvestmen, bearing polished pitchforks upon their burly shoulders, eyeing the leaning, swaying load, as it now and again threatens to overbalance. At last all danger is over and the straight and level road into the village reached. A triumphal shout is echoed by an expectant crowd, while one

who rides chin-high on top of the load, and whose rough head and waving hat are alone to be seen, will lead off the chorus:—

“Well ploughed, well sown,  
Well reaped, well mown,  
Never a waggon overthrown,  
Hip, Hip, Harvest Home!”

George, who sees another chance for a “nigh cut” (by crossing full fifty acres of stiff stubble), is thinking of the last load also; for abating his pace not one jot, he sings with old-fashioned drawl the good old verse, winding up with a half-melancholy and long-drawn, “Ho-o-o-me! Home! Home!” As the word fills the early evening air, this sweetest word in our language sounds doubly sweet; and George’s quaint and plaintive rendering of it carries thought back three hundred harvest-times ago, to the sound of the same ancient verse, caught up and echoed by Farmer Fitzherbert and his farming-men; he who one time discoursed upon “Divers maners of Plowes,” telling in bold black-letter-type,

“how there bee plowes of divers makinges in divers countreys, and in lykewise there bee plowes of iron of divers facyons.” Echoed, too, by Master Thomas Tusser, who loved God’s goodly gifts whether in “Champion” or in “Severall.” And by Gerarde and Barnaby Googe, and by yeoman Latimer, “that husbandman of good repute, who kept hospitalitie for his poore neighbours, and sum almes he gave to the poore; and all thys did he of the sayd farme;” where “good huswife mylked thirty kyne,” and led by the hand the little Hugh Latimer through the Thirkesson pastures. That Hugh Latimer who was one day to stand, clad “in poor Bristow freezy frock, much worn,” with buttoned cap and kerchief on his head, “all ready to the fire,” outside the walls of frowning Balliol, there to say to Dr. Ridley, “We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.” We have forgotten the Present, and the broad field is filled with those figures of the Past—

those fine old English farmers of the troublous times, hunted and harried by superstition, worn and weakened sometime by blood and battle, but now joyfully striding down the fields of Paradise beside their stalwart serving-men, and giving good praise to God in one great cry of "Harvest Home!"

*Multa renascentur, quae jam cecidere: cadentque  
Quae nunc sunt in honore.*

Except Home—for Home the hearth of Love is Eternal.

We must at last be nearing our destination, though the dogged and indomitable George cannot be made to say now close we may be. "We warnts to get into the wood, sir;" and after a short search for an opening, in which we are unsuccessful, George decides to make one, and to this purpose wriggles up the bank, and with a crash goes through brush and brake, landing with a grunt upon the other side and within the wood. Here, seeing that we progress very nearly as straight as a bee-line, clinging

briar puts the tension on sorely tried legs and their coverings, relief being afforded only when a riding is crossed, up and down which busy rabbits scamper to their burrows, or sit up and listen to the unwonted sound of crackling twigs, which disturbs the evening stillness.

This cross-country business is an elaborate and deliberate system of trespassing, but it is Sunday evening, and we may charitably hope that both keepers and under-keepers are otherwise engaged, for hitherto we have met no one.

But we can see distance through the trees, and now we are at the edge of the wood, and ah! we have come suddenly upon the quietest and greenest of valleys, and are on the top of a ridge running right and left. On the opposite heights is marshalled an imposing army of fir-trees, which look down in silence upon the brook which lies in the bottom, winding through the wooded amphitheatre. The sun has left the hollow, and his reddened ring will soon be broken

by some fir-top as he dips behind the wood, to rise from out the sea upon the solemn pines of the sister-hemisphere.

Half-way up the other side of the valley, lies a deserted-looking building, standing grey, and stern, and weird, against the hill.

"There," says George, "Lookee, sir, that there be Nobes's Tomb." It is a curious fact, that as the descent is made, George's memory becomes clearer, and more is learned unasked concerning the place, than all our previous questions had elicited, artfully worded as they were with the view of extracting information. Hitherto, by dint of asking, we have discovered what George did *not* know; now, by keeping silence, we find out what George *does* know—a good deal, considering that good Master Nobes has been entombed two hundred years. Remembering sundry college failures, we mentally add to our stock of knowledge this fact, that as there we discovered that we had never learned the art of being examined, so here we have discovered the humbling fact that

we are equally ignorant of the art of examining—in which latter particular we can sympathise with many scholastic dons, who are yet but undergraduates in the science of working out knowledge from cube-roots of stupidity.

“That’s the farm-standin’ as old Nobes built fo’ hisself a great while ago. An’ that there building to yer left is part o’ the big barn—but folks don’t build such barns nowadays, fo’ all the corn’s threshed out by machines in the farm-yard, an’ they ’as a thing as they calls a elevator, what stacks the straw as well: it’s a savin’, I s’pose, but hand-threshin’s gone out till there bēarnt a one in a score as can fling a flail like when I war a lad. Yer can see where them walls ’ave went—right up under yon dead oak. ’Tis onsigthly, bēarnt it? more like a gibbet nor owt; an’ the lazy|lubbards will be acryin’ out for fuel at Yule-tide, instead o’ cuttin’ ’im down an’ storin’ ’im in the wood-barn. Lookee, sir, yer sees that clump o’ dwarf oaks round a pile o’ stone? well, that’s

the *Tomb*, though it's all called Nobes's Tomb now-a-days, 'ouse an' all. Lookee, this Master Nobes had a whim as 'ow 'ee an' 'is old missus wouldn't be took enough care of in the church-yard, and so what must he do but build hisself a grand tomb 'ere, and 'ave a churchyard all to hisself, so as 'ee'd be all snug along o' 'is missus, ready-like to go to the Judgment-day. P'raps he thought the devil wouldn't think to look for 'im 'ere, but methinks ee's found him most a'ready by the looks o' the place. He must ha' laid out a smart bit of money over 'is fancy, but it aint done 'em no good, nor nobody else neither. Ee'd better by 'arf a gorn orf along o' 'is missus to the church-yard, along o' good company, where most folks is content to lay. He reckoned, I s'pose, as no one wouldn't warnt to meddle with 'im 'ere; but folks as 'ave bin since, an' pulled the old place about, thinks different seemingly."

"Is the farm large, and is the land good?"

"'Bout sixty acres, in an' out; but it's an



unked farm, and poor mean land. This 'ere grass-field bëarn't so bad; but it ain't farmed proper—lookee, sir, at this great weed—why, yer might tether a cow to 'im an' she'd be safe enow. Lookee, sir, yer sees them two fields, one oats and t'other barley? Well, I've ee'rd as 'ow in the deeds as go along wi' the farm, them two fields is for a-keepin' up and a-repairin' o' the Tomb; but somehow the land's changed masters many's the time, for no one carn't work it profitable-like. Now Squire Trelawney's got it, 'im as owns the Knave's Acre Estate; and the old will's got twisted and tumbled one way and t'other, till no one don't know anything now-a-days about the two fields. Yer see, sir, Squire Trelawney aint no farmer; he bees an improver, and so they two fields don't go towards a-keepin' up the Tomb; they goes to a-buildin' moddle cottages, what looks fine enow for a lord from the road, but when yer gets inside 'em there bëarn't a chimley-corner nor no convenience nohows. Then there's them new-fangled ranges what makes

a sorry show when yer comes in out of the wet o' winter times, and warnts a blaze."

By this time we are down in the bottom and beginning to ascend again. The house rears up against the hill in massive solitude: the dark and gloomy exterior giving the idea that the house has been untenanted since the departure of Nobes. Although it is harvest-time, there are no signs of preparation. A broken cart-wheel lies against the ruined part of the barn wall, and has evidently rotted and settled down, and rotted and settled lower, till now the axle is hidden among the luxuriant nettles. The farmhouse itself stands up strong and defiant against Time's encroachments, probably from the fact that it was built upon the same principle on which the fortresses of that period were constructed.

There is no one about. The quiet of the hill-sides around, there so grateful and resting, seems irksome and unnatural here. The battlements suggest recesses wherein may still lurk the souls of speechless churls. The

narrow mullioned windows conjure up fancies of Something that sits behind in silence and watches—watches unseen, until—the rash intruder once well within—it may turn in formless guise, and grip its toll—that toll, one's reason. The many-chimnied stack, rising up from the centre like a watch-tower, looks flat against the growing twilight. But—yes, it *is* smoke—a thin pale wreath of blue smoke that rises up, slowly following that daw who has just lifted himself from the recesses of this strange unearthly pile. At the same moment, a grand and savage-looking hound appears round the corner, and fills the quiet air with the clamour of his wrathful bay. A few paces behind him, the figure of a man appears, standing up still as the stones around—the dog lowers his head, and advances with an ominous rush, but runs back again to heel as swiftly, with a sharp, quick cry of pain as well as of rage, for something large and dark has struck him.

George hails the figure with a “Hullo,

maister!" the echo of which returns from the gloomy side-wall, very small and very weird, and is drowned in a loud gruff "Hulloo!" which seems to come from all round the house at once.

A low and continued rumbling is maintained from the crater of the canine volcano in the rear.

We are in front of a figure above the average height, by that huge head upon it, and made larger by the background of thick and bright red hair in which it is set; its legs are long and thin, its arms are bare to the elbows, and its shirt and waistcoat are open.

"Good evening, maister," says George, "it be a foin time fo' harvest."

"So it be, an' a poor time fo' folk as bëarnt maisters."

"You seem to be maister, hereabouts, how-somedever," says George in a decided tone.

"That be my business," replies the figure, who is evidently not civilly inclined on this occasion, by his speech—nor on any other, by his appearance.

The frontal development is huge, the face generally, with its red aureole, detestable. The nose has been called by someone "the outtress of the brain," but it might better be described as the buttress to the breast-plate of the brain. From the all but noseless nostrils in this specimen, the forehead is reduced to standing entirely upon its own merits, which it attempts to do obtrusively enough, but so unsuccessfully, that to describe it as depending from the tangled roots of the figure's fiery hair would perhaps convey a truer idea.

"Why, yer bees Luke Lowesley, bëarn't ye?" says George, with a peculiar quiet manner about him which betokens the late-found recognition not to be an all-friendly one.

The reply comes with a self-satisfied and cunning sneer, "Yer ses as I be."

"Why, I thowt as I ought to 'a' knowed yer. 'Ow long 'ave yer bin over in this part of the country?"

"I cum when I warnted to, an' I'll goo when I warnts to goo."

George sees his turn for reply, and says quietly, but sarcastically, "'Tis well to be maister now-a-days, an' to come as yer warnts, an' to goo as yer warnts, an' to do as yer warnts, and to be civil as yer warnts, fo' 'igh folks can't do that; they has to be civil one to t'other allus, so yer sees, Maister Luke Lowelsey, yer bees maister hereabouts, after all."

The ill-humour of the figure does not seem to be increased at this speech—probably from the fact that the multitude of words in George's somewhat lengthy sentence have got mixed up and lost their sequence in the sensorium of this cephalic monster.

To say we are in the presence of Luke Lowesley sounds tame and meaningless; to say that we stand before the huge "Hide-in-the-Pot," is a far more startling and not-to-be-forgotten fact.

The next moment we change our relative positions in more senses than one for advancing nearer, George says; "Well,

Maister Luke, we be come over to 'ave a look, if it bëarn't no offence, at Nobes's Tomb. This gen'lman likes curious, strange-like things, an' so I've brought him over for to make out the readings as used to be on them stones, when I war a lad." At this Hide-in-the-Pot's manner becomes a trifle more civil, though not a whit less uncouth, and he says, "It bëarnt much as I knows o' the old heap;" and raising and extending his broad red arm, he adds, "that's where it is; that 'eap o' rubbish under them oaks," and continues in a would-be-communicative mood, "They women as weeded out the wheat took a tidy lot o' them stownes away, for to plant down in the brook, so as they could go over dry-shod."

Relieved by the unlooked-for condescension of this speech, we move gently towards the Tomb, keeping a wakeful eye withal upon Hide-in-the-Pot's familiar demon, in case that Cerberus should become suddenly moved by a spirit of independence. From a bird's-eye view he appears content to bide his

time ; but he cannot be said to look peaceful or mollified.

A sharp declivity leads to the now shapeless pile. It stands in a little unhealthy-looking hollow, about a stone's throw from the house, with half-a-dozen oak-trees leaning in various directions around the remains of an old broken-down iron railing. One or two tree-trunks are rubbed and polished smooth. Is it from cattle rubbing against them? No ; it is from the children crawling up and down—indeed, there is something moving about the branches now—and suddenly a wild-looking creature with chestnut coloured limbs and paws, but dressed in a bodice and petticoat, slides down and disappears like a frightened jaguar into the jungle beyond. From the erect position which it assumes as it flees, it is probably human and—from the flowing red mane—a girl.

The trees are dwarf, but aged. Life and Death are fighting for each branch, and at present Death seems to have the harder grip.



In the larger forks luxuriant clumps of green foliage nestle strong and sturdy ; but from their very cores strike out long and leafless branches, which stretch out contorted fingers into the open sky. Upon one long and wizen forefinger hangs the skeleton of a bird, clothed only in its wing-feathers, swinging and rotting on the bough where it fell in its last flight.

The railing is ruinous, rusted and twisted into fantastic shapes. The spear-headed bars bent or broken, and thinned down to a third of their former size, are in this, almost their last state of existence, strangled with winding briar and many another sprouting plant.

George says " Summat's bin at work 'ere, an' since I last seed it, too, fo' that there bit o' fencin' used to stand up by hisself."

Within what is now the mere indication of a boundary, is a large heap of stone blocks lying piled up in riotous confusion, a portion of two sides of the original Tomb, still withstanding the demolishments around. The thickness of these shews that the other

portion did not fall from mere decay; the hand of the desecrator has pushed farther than the gnawing tooth of time. The walls, which even now shew excellent and careful laying and workmanship, are fringed on the summit with a line of rank grasses, and here and there a flowering purple thistle, the standard-bearer of this little army of invading weeds.

There is no letter or symbol upon the masonry of that part of the wall which is now standing. Within the angle made by these walls, the last breakwater of the waves of destruction, the pile of overturned stones, rises in a heap to the height of some five feet, while Nature, the ancient economist, sees here a haunt of life for the dock and dead-nettle—Nature, that shadow of a mighty Name, who first went down the world sowing broad-cast the seeds of future souls, but now so long ago, that tradition tells, and tells but faintly, when or where she first filled the furrows of an empty earth. Faith, the Son of God, can tell with

happiest certainty, of some great barn in far eternity, where Nature's Lord has hung this ripened planet's seed-basket. *Stat promissa fides.*

Here in this disused charnel-house, life begins anew; the strength which started it is such as man has never found.

The place must have been built entirely above ground, with no crypt or undercroft, oblong in shape, and set almost due north and south. So then he who built this tomb had no care or wish to be looking east, like his neighbours up in the church-yard. At the north end are the remains of what was once the entrance—part of two stout grooved Doric pillars still afford a stool upon which unwholesome fungi may sit and sleep. Lying uppermost upon the heap is a broken abacus. The tomb was evidently Doric in design, for on moving some of the upper stones, parts of the triglyph and cornice appear. Allowing for the stones which went to bridge the brook, and also for sundry others, which, in all probability, Hide-in-the-

Pot and others have from time to time appropriated for domestic or other purposes, the Tomb with its roof on must have originally stood about eight feet high; and being built after the fashion of a Greek temple with the prostyle, would be in area about the size of an ordinary church porch, and contain a simple *cella* or dark room.

The moving of the stones is a work of difficulty and labour, and our spirit of inquiry is not appreciated or reciprocated by Hide-in-the-Pot, who stands looking on in an indifferent and insensate manner. George is trying to hold a conversation, but the barbarian shares in this only by a monosyllabic reply, or an ignorantly malevolent remark.

In bending low to move a block, we get a view between our legs of that ruby in a rufoid setting, the eye of Hide-in-the-Pot: the inverted aspect changes but does not improve the general expression, the chief difference being that the unsightly reality partakes more of the nature of an unpleasant dream.

"Nobody don't never find out nothing as they looks fo'," is the unscientific remark made by Hide-in-the-Pot, who appears to be looking at nothing, very idly, yet animated somewhat by a sense of resentment at our unwelcome intrusion.

A spirit of repartee prompts us to reply, "No, not even pheasants and ground-game, on a shiny night;" but as Hide-in-the-Pot might consider this general remark to be personally directed against his own poaching proclivities, we remain discreetly silent.

George, however, has no such fear, and "'Sposes when 'ee first come, an' 'ad nothin' better for to do, that he just cast a glance round, and may be found summut seemingly?" Here George drops his eyelid a moment, which, when it opens again, discovers the clear grey organ behind, looking piercingly over the heap of ruins, and he continues; "Not as 'ow yer war a-lookin' fo summut, but may be, 'ere an' there yer found a bit or two o' lead as used fo' to line the inside o' the Tomb when I war a lad, an'

warnted lead for bullets for to scare the rooks orf the corn?" George pauses to have another wink, and then adds, "But, law, there ain't no need for bullets hereabouts, now-a-days, be they, Maister Luke, fo' there bëarn't no bird, varmint nor gëame either about, no hows nigh?"

There is a silence, and we again look through the window of our legs, expecting to see a topsy-turvy commencement of open hostilities.

Hide-in-the-Pot's mouth is half open, as if about to disgorge a flood of oaths so soon as they shall have bubbled up his savage-looking throat. George however is looking quietly at him, full in the face, and with an irritating assumption of superior power—his eye droops somewhat, but like that of an old watch-hound, content to watch and guard, ready to spring and act.

The effect upon Hide-in-the-Pot is remarkable: he becomes almost civil after he has averred that, "He'd never found no lead, if that's w'at yer means."

George who has not done yet, answers, "May be ye looked too often, Luke? The barley corn's the heart's key, as we say in our part."

At this moment, we turn over a large stone, green with lichen, and encrusted with dirt, but bearing upon one side some graven characters. Scraping with a penknife reveals letters and Roman numerals of antique cut; and clearing off the lichen we read:—

M. DC.

The rest of the date was evidently upon a stone which once lay next to this, but further search does not find it. Perhaps it is buried, or perhaps it stops a gap in the chimney of Hide-in-the-Pot's stronghold; or the feet of many field-folk may have worn its crumbling characters away, and scattered them into the brook, where they may the earlier meet their fate in the Stream of Time.

No other marks are to be found to tell the tale of the past. A modern and realistic stinging-nettle puts in our hands a claim for the present; and so, stumbling back over the heap of ruins matted with bramble and briar, we turn our thoughts to the house. It rears up now in the waning light like a castellated convent, the outline of which is clear and sharp, but whose shadows may conceal the darkest deeds.

Hide-in-the-Pot tells us nothing that we cannot see, and does not volunteer to introduce us to any part of the ancient building.

While George and he are talking, or rather contradicting one another in rustic word-warfare, we describe a parabolic curve towards the fortress, keeping a regardful eye upon the short-haired, short-tempered piece of fury, which lies stretched across its doorway.

The house is of an earlier date than the Tomb, probably of sixteenth century archi-



tecture ; the windows, narrow and mullioned, shew the thickness of the walls, which look as if built against intrusion from stone balls and other weapons of siege : battlements protect the lower part of the gables, which appear to have settled down, oppressed with their own antiquity.

Is it impossible to get a look through that open window, the casement of which yawns out, as it hangs feebly from a single rusted hinge ?

It would be satisfactory to have a peep through this weird window upon the forbidden and mysterious sights which might reward a daring curiosity ; but upon a nearer approach, Cerberus begins to grumble, and the eye of Hide-in-the-Pot is upon us.

George and he are moving slowly up towards the house, and the former remarks that it has been a "tidy ole farm," and suggests that Nobes may have built it.

"It be an ole ancient place, an' cruel cold o' winter-time ; I never 'eerd as who builded it."

We suggest that although there are no letters or dates upon the walls on this side, yet perhaps there may be some on the others? Or perhaps that some might be found within? the latter hint being dropped with the hope of finding the most civil and obliging corner of Hide-in-the-Pot's heart. It proves however a sorry failure, for Hide-in-the-Pot looks decidedly inhospitable, and Cerberus defiant and menacing.

"No, I never seed no writin' nor sich-like nowhere."

Attempt upon attempt fails, until George says boldly, "This gen'elman knows 'bout ole-fashioned places, and 'ees a hartist harch-itect sort o' genelman; I s'pose yer wouldn't take it no harm done, just to let us step in an' have a look round?" Hide-in-the-Pot spits, and weighing down his red hair with his heavy hand, which rises *rampant regardant* as soon as the pressure is removed, says, "There bēarnt nuthin inside whatsumdever—poor folks like we never 'ave nuthin' in our insides," and adds with ill-grace, "Howsumd-

ever, the genelman wont warnt to see a poor place like mine, but yere welcomb to walk in just for a minit."

Hide-in-the-Pot stalks slowly forward, by a process of alternately knocking a leg away from under him. Cerberus, the green-eyed monster lying athwart the threshold, looks sidelong upwards, and, calculating from previous knowledge how long it is safe to remain in that position, springs away with a bound, thereby deftly avoiding a matter-of-course and automatic kick launched at his ragged ribs. Hide-in-the-Pot stoops—the excitement commences, as we enter to slow music, from Cerberus in the rear. The house strikes very chill and damp, and is very dark; so dark, that for a few moments the narrow opening of the window and some blazing logs are the only things to be seen. There is a peculiar smell as of some decoction brewing near at hand—but where is the smoke? and where is the cauldron? A black crane swings its inquisitorial hook over the flames—like a gibbet

it looks, but where is the blackened body that ought to hang from the chain ?

Gradually, the centre of the room, and the central object, a broken table with ancient and handsomely carved legs, begin to shew forth ; then dark corners come partially into view, and lastly intense and concentrated dirt becomes apparent. The cold chill which struck us as we entered, comes not alone from the uneven brick floor, but from the plastered walls, the low wooden ceiling—the everything.

It is a wretched place. Wretched for man to inhabit, wretched even for foul spirits to haunt, who are suffered to be independent of buskin-coverings and stout boots, and the rheumatism and misery which a want of those articles involves.

Instinctively, we look back through the open door—the warm pure evening light fills the upper portion ; but below stands Cerberus, half hid in the shadow of the darkened room, with his great gaunt hind-quarters shewing strong and hard in the

outside light. Should Hide-in-the-Pot desire to "speed the parting guest," exit at this moment might be hazardous.

The whole of the interior is dark, dirty and desolate in the extreme. Under the table on the bricks is a large blue platter cracked across, the two halves being a full inch apart from one another, conveying the impression that they lie as they lay when first they dissolved partnership.

Except this single cracked dish, no crockery whatever is to be seen; indeed there are no kitchen utensils about, and save the table, there is no furniture in this dungeon-like abode.

It is difficult to think that anyone does really live here. Once a day a file of fiends might pass through on their way to Pandemonium, but no distinctive human influence pervades the place.

The night-wind rises outside; we can hear it sighing. In the great hollow chimney, it moans complainingly, and in the empty room, it creeps round hidden cor-

ners. What must that chimney sound like in a winter storm, when all the evil spirits huddle together and perch upon the beams, coming in troops out of the cold, warming themselves in the black hot smoke, and shrieking and howling for their food of frightened souls? Demoniactal enough it sounds to-night, though pitched now in such a subtle key that George's more aged ears do not hear it. The same strange strong smell, the like of which we perceived on entering, is wafted past us from time to time; a smell, indeed, the like of which we have smelled before in other places, but where? It is undoubtedly a kitchen smell of some sort—but of what?

A settle runs from the huge fire place, half across the room; fresh logs have lately been thrown on an unusually large fire for this hour and for this time of year. We observe that in the place of iron-dogs four stones and a couple of iron-rails from the Tomb do duty—this being apparent from the spear-heads in which they terminate.

Hide-in-the-Pot casually observes, that "You 'as to keep up a terrible big fire, summer an' winter alike, 'cos o' the damp." As the logs spit and sputter they send a glow into Hide-in-the Pot's face, and give to it an appearance something frightful. That this is the Rendezvous, that the witches are in the air, is certain; the cauldron alone is wanting, that Hide-in-the-Pot may begin, in accent awful and hellish :—

" Make the gruel thick and slab,  
Add thereto a tiger's chawdron,  
For the ingredients of our cauldron;  
Double, double, toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble!"

In this immense chimney-corner a whole watch might have sat and warmed themselves, and one time, probably did. Upon the high narrow mantelshelf is a cruel rat-trap, the hanging chain of which knocks against our heads, thus calling attention to its presence. This is the only article upon the shelf. Upon the wall above is an empty gun-rack. Walking across the hearth, we

come upon a box stowed away in a dark recess; something moves in it. Some fiendish scion of the house of Cerberus—we gently step back a pace, remembering hereditary tendencies. But the scion has already noticed us—another moment, and from the heap comes a cry—a cry—but a cry from no canine throat—a sound the most human which we have heard since we entered this ghost-house—the weak petulant cry of a sickly babe! It is a baby—yes, a little brown but human baby!

We inquire of Hide-in-the-Pot, “Yours?” The reply is a strange contrast and comes in his gruffest note.

“Yes, I s’pose ’ee be one o’ mine.” And so this gaoler of Doubting Castle has a child—a young brown baby!

“Has Hide-in-the-Pot any more?”

“Yes, fower as I’ve sent ’bout their business, the young varmints, an’ one young brat as the missis ’ad o’ Friday night, an’ this ’ere young devil.”

A moment ago, “this ’ere young devil”



was the surprise ; now the other yet younger and more diabolically human babe 'is a greater revelation ; we conceal our revulsion, however, and politely ask after the invalid, in a naturally lowered voice, and looking up at the wooden beams overhead, as we inquire how she may be doing? Hide-in-the-Pot cannot have understood us surely, for—gross unreasonableness! he resents this delicate allusion, becomes violently fiery, and replies ; “Doin', doin'—'ow be I to know what she 'be a-doin'? She war a-doin' a bit o' washin' when yer come and axed me for to see all about everythink.”

George interferes by saying solemnly :—

“I used to make my missus think o' all that sort o' thing afore—fo' young children needs a smart bit o' nursin' the first few days.”

We think it wiser to make no more comments or kind inquiries.

A door, somewhere or other, bangs to, and from a dark and remote corner

comes that strange odour again, this time pungent and strong; but this time also the particles range themselves in order, as they enter, and march up our nostrils, and lo! the word "Hare" is upon our tongue! Yes, it is hare, roast, jugged or devilled, it is unmistakeable hare.

Hide-in-the-Pot, thou canst catch thy hare unperceived, thou canst kill thy hare unheard; thou canst bag and boil thy hare unseen; but thou canst not prevent thy hare telling her tale after death through the subtler sense of smell.

Thou art discovered, Hide-in-the-Pot; thou art a poacher; and thy vestal fire is a subterfuge.

Would that the cauldron were to be seen whence this naughty Nimrod receives his name!

Doubtless Dobby and Pouch have made many a secret journey over here, from Otterford-beyond-the-Elms. We can fancy the trio over the cauldron, and the wide-

mouthed Pouch hoarsely asking of Hide-in-the-Pot,

“When shall we three meet again,  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?”

While Hide-in-the-Pot, as Captain of the gang, replies,

“That will be ere set of sun.”

This then is the scene also of the numerous “little odd jobs,” which are referred to so innocently by Dobby the Doubtful.

We can see them in our mind’s eye, coming on a summer’s night through the grass, lying low upon their backs if they hear foot-falls in the road close at hand; we can see them on some early November morning, creeping quietly up to the gloomy house, their figures magnified in the mist as they “hover through the fog and filthy air.” We can see them again (as we saw them once), riding beside Jerry in his cart, and aiding him orally and manually in urging along the overburdened “Tickler,” as that

faithful ass did his best to drag his heavy draught of secrets into Lustlow-in-Arden. We had fallen into a reverie—Cerberus barks us out of it, considering, perhaps, that we have spied enough of the nakedness of his master's kitchen.

George thinks "as 'ow wee'd better be a-goin' if we warnts to get back afore ten o'clock"—an hour when, according to his creed, all quiet people ought to be a-bed.

We move—but what on earth is that? A figure, dimly seen in the darkness, and which appears to have come from nowhere at all, emerges and stands forth. A woman—large, obese as an overgrown wurzel, and as shapeless; her hair hanging down about her face on one side, the rest gathered up in a ball at the back of her head; her enormous neck rooted into a chest that is surprisingly white, if it is always exposed as it is at present.

She has crept in, silent as a dream, and now moving forwards makes no sound upon the brick floor.

We say, "Good evening," and ask after

the baby; she stares inquiringly at our lips and tries to curtsy, but signally and ludicrously fails, being in configuration a solid cube of humanity, rounded at the corners.

After a pause, we again ask after the baby, and if it is a boy or a girl—believing this to be the formula in use among women-kind, and desiring to affect their interest and sympathy in things tender and helpless.

This time there is a longer pause, and the woman shuffles off to the box by the fire, and gives it a peremptory push back into the darkness, while Hide-in-the-Pot bursts out into a yell of savage laughter, and cunningly remarks,

“The ole hooman döan’t ’ear a word as yer ses; she be as deaf as a dung-prong,” and again gives vent to his evil merriment.

The invalid shuffles off, and out of the kitchen, as she shuffled in—noiselessly; but a few seconds after, by the uncanny creaking of some wooden stairs, we know that she is creeping up to her youngest born.

Hide-in-the-Pot says, "I told yer as 'ow there war no writin' in the ole place;" and we turn to the door, from which Cerberus backs a foot or two, and sits eyeing the expression on his master's face, calmly awaiting his verdict—peace or war.

Hide-in-the-Pot's parting "Thankye," at the threshold, while we might be supposed by some to be shaking hands, is the civillest sentence he has spoken during this memorable interview; but the edge of its sweetness is somewhat taken off by an oath directed to the first born "varmint," who, having been sent about its business earlier in the evening, is returning to the parental dovecot, towards which we now see two other "varmint" advancing, but after the fashion of skulking runaway slaves.

George bids farewell, but fires a parting shot as we descend the hill, by calling back, "I wishes as I didn't bide five miles orf that 'ere bit o' supper as I smells."

A loud long "Dom ye!" from Hide-in-the-Pot, a loud long whine from Cerberus,

and we are well away from Doubting Castle.

\* \* \* \*

George is silent for a while as we walk back, until we ascend the opposite side of the valley, getting up into the last light once more; where he turns and gazes back at the unhallowed gables now looking more grim and mysterious than ever. Arrived at the top, George says, "'E allus were a bad lot, an out an' out bad lot, born and brought up orf a bad lot; 'twas 'is fayther as got transplanted fo' burnin' the barns down in the west country. The last time as I see Luke were nigh twelve year ago now, over at Salisbury Spring Assizes, and 'ee warn't his own maister then, not by no means. Look-ee, Sir, 'im an' that there drolloping old hooman as you see—well, they war a-standin' side by side fo' felony and conspirin' to kill a child as 'ad bin his wife's, only she war dead, for look-ee, sir, this ee'r child war found drowned and mauled in Avon-weir, an' this yer jolter-headed hooman 'ad kep' it an'

done fo' it like, after the death o' Missus Lowesley, as there were a smart bit o' talk about 'er cause of death, fo' this 'ere hooman 'ad allus a-knowed more than she shud o' Luke."

"Then, were they imprisoned, George?"

"Looke, sir, there were a smart bit o' talk 'bout that, for they didn't get nuthin' done to 'em. She war 'ard o' 'earin', and couldn't read nor write, an' kep' a-sayin' 'Yeth,' to everything—an' there she war a-'yethin'' away, and the lawyer-chap spoke as 'ow she ought to be let orf cos' they couldn't prove nuthin', but as 'ow she'd beat the child. But all the town's folk 'issed 'em, an' I and old Zachery Pugh got a put out fo' 'issin'."

"Do you know how he came to live over here, George?"

"No, sir; beggin' yer parding, for I didn't know who might be a-livin' there no more than yerself did until I see'd him and knowed 'im agen."

We both turn once more to have a last



look at the Tomb—now dimmed in the mist, which is creeping about around the house ; and then we plunge into the wood. It is very dark and solemn within, the birds are uttering their last sleepy twitter, as they dig their bills under their wings. All is very quiet. George, who is undoubtedly bent on returning as we came, across country, sets his course with a confidence which shews he knows the way. This is called the “Long Wood ;” but thought makes it seem short, and once in the open, we soon come upon the stubble and yellow-tinted fields again.

It is the same pace, up hill, down dale, helter-skelter everywhere, through the fields in open order, through the woods in Indian file, where we recognise and once more encounter the scenes of our former woes. The swallows have ceased to hawk for flies, and bats now continue the airy hunt. We are through the last wood, and presently emerge at the summit of What-Call-Hill ; the village has gone to bed, but the ceaseless

sound of the weir rises up, playing its night-long lullaby to all.

We are glad to welcome that silver band that winds along the meadows, through many a pleasant mile of reach and shallow, rush and reed-bed, weir and ferry; and we look on each bend, each island of the river, with a welcome, as after a return from years of absence, rather than from only a few short hours.

It is as we descend the hill that we learn the last piece of information about the strange place we have just visited. George tells us that; "the ole Tomb's 'ad bad usage, an' since I were a lad, too, for it warn't so tumble-down then. The fence was a-standin', an' the walls, an' 'eed got a top on 'im, but the door was orf 'is hinges an' gone, fo' folks used to say as 'ow old Midnight Green, as I call to mind well, 'ad bin inside and taken away two ole chairs, an' a ole table what were there fo' ole Nobes an' 'is missus. But Midnight Green allus walked crooked ever arter, an' I can call 'im to mind now, a ole

ancient 'arf darft man, bent nigh double, a-pickin' up orfal, and sich-like from the road-side, for to put in 'is wallet. No! e'e warn't never no good arter e'e broke into the Tomb, folks said. But it were talked on as 'ow 'ee found old Nobes and 'is missus' skellingtons a-sittin' bolt upright in them two chairs, but I döan't know so much 'bout that, for lookee, no body ever told on as 'ow they'd *seen* the skellingtons."

The village lies in its first sleep; under the eaves of Pibbles' cottage the parent martins are dreaming over a second brood that is to make song out of the five white eggs they are keeping warm. As we go through the dark tunnel of elms we see through the opening at the other end, a single beam of yellow light lying across the road, thrown by a rushlight in George's cottage.

Is it in this sombre part of Otterford that the souls of departed cronies congregate to gossip again and again over the deeds and sayings of their little by-gone world?

Perhaps the old folks are about on this August night, coming as they used to do in the cool of the evening, to discuss things done, and things to be thought over! Do they hover where the elm leaves tremble and touch one another? Do they linger where the glow-worms light up their little lanterns, now yellow, now blue, upon the grassy damp bankside; moving slowly like little fisher-boats dipping at anchor all night upon a summer sea? Drip—pat—drip. Is it falling dew, or the breath of their spirit voices?

Does the long dead, graveless husbandman lead his housewife down behind the veil of ancient elms? Perhaps they are there to-night; perhaps they listen and hear old George, the child of a third or fourth generation of them they once greeted, say—“Lookee, sir, lookee; it's too long ago now-a-days; it war too long ago when I war a lad, for to know much of ole Nobes, an' his t'other name, for things does get mixed and muddled up most wonderful-

like in ancient history. It's like them sparrers as it tells on in the Book, as parson reads orf in church, where it says as 'ow ne'er a one doänt fall to the ground as God döant keep count on; an' so some folks drop orf, one by one, and most gets forgot-like in time, fo' sparrers is so powerful many, men can't keep count on 'em all; an' so it's God alone now-a-days as knows ole Nobes's ancient history, an' all 'bout 'im. An' that's why I thinks, beggin' yer parding, as 'ow Nobes warn't never his right name at all. Nobes ain't no name whatsumdever, any way as yer turns it, in all the country round: an' I thinks as 'ow no one döan't know his right name now-a-days, an' as Nobes's Tomb were so called 'cos nobody döan't know whose 't was, an' as 'ow the right meaning is—Nobody's Tomb."

V.

SURGEON-MAJOR TOD  
THOMSON.

“SUICIDE”—“Temporary insanity.”—These words form the Alpha and Omega of many a paragraph in the newspapers. They may be said to “hunt in couples.” Rarely is the one seen without the other. The first statement is a fact, the other generally an inference only. To a philosopher, looking at it from a purely philosophical point of view, it appears strange that twelve averagely stupid men should be asked to draw the psychological line between moral responsibility and its converse; but we are all glad that their verdict should not be called into question in too scientifically critical a manner. Suicide is not embalmed nowa-

days at the cross-roads. A more merciful generation stretches a point wherever it possibly can, and allows the suicide to rest in a quiet corner of the churchyard. "*Felo de se*" is an ugly term, and though it be denied Christian burial, and condemned to lie in a nameless grave, yet is its place never forgotten; for after death comes tradition, and brands the three ugly words above the bones, in indelible letters; and, while headstones lean and crumble and fall in the forgotten past, children's children remember *this* grave as they approach and whisper, "It is *here*."

Still, the theory that a man is "mad enough" to kill himself, is not always the kindest one. A man may be, and very generally *is* mad enough to kill himself: but is he not sometimes sad enough? and in rare cases does he not feel himself bad enough, to end that life which has become intolerable to him among his fellow-men? If you or I, dear reader, take a plunge before breakfast in the river, no one will question the

sanity of our intent. And, if any one plunge into that other deeper, darker river, and return no more, have we a right—without other facts—to infer that he was irresponsible for his action?

I am not going to tell you that these crude thoughts were passing through the fevered brain of Surgeon-Major Tod Thomson, as he leaned out of the window of the Hotel "*Lion Belge*," on the *Quai Napoléon* in Antwerp, one early March afternoon.

No! As he sat puffing his Habana, and lazily looking at the ferry-boat with its passengers from the *Chemin de Fer de Gand*, he was simply thinking of just such an afternoon, thirty years ago, when he slowly passed up the Hooghly to join his regiment as Assistant-Surgeon Thomson, the "new saw-bones," coming out, "*vice* Surgeon Cajeput, promoted." He was thinking of the long line of East Indiamen moored two and two—of Garden Reach—of the swollen disfigured corpses which the tide bore down every now-and-then; and of all the



other novel and strange sights which greeted him as his voyage ended, and he found himself in the New World of John Company. Nothing more.

It was a bright cold afternoon, with a sun that made you shiver—a small yellow sun that flashed and faded in a thorough Belgian sky, among clouds, white and detached, which scudded before a cruel biting east wind, like a flock of worried sheep. It was a sky for an artist's soul, but not for an artist's fingers. Yet, with a top-coat, and a cigar, and a window looking west—like this one of the "*Lion Belge*," one could enjoy the view and forget the weather. Surgeon Thomson, with nothing particular to do, was waiting for a friend, and was spending the interval, having finished the *Times* and the *Indépendance Belge*, by looking out of window, and letting his thoughts float about, like the tide in front, which was just turning, and had not yet made up its mind which way to turn.

It was a wonderful view this, from the

Hotel window. Something was always going on. Away, across the Scheldt, stretched the wide low-lying lands, traversed by long lines of Belgian poplars, which dwindled in perspective, until they became toy-trees and disappeared in the vanishing point. Along the banks ran the Dyke, with here and there a grass-green fort, protecting a great flag-staff on which to display the Belgian banner. Then the river—that great historic highway of the ancient city, flowing by, always bearing some craft or other on its broad grey tide—moored, or moving down, one by one, towards the great sea, the windy play-ground of the Norseman—or clustered together in the docks, the pride of Antwerp, and the nest for ships-of-passage of all the world. This afternoon the sun kept flashing from the serried ranks of bright spars, till they gleamed like spears. It was a scene that the querulous and crippled invalid might gaze on for weeks, and forget the while that he himself was debarred from joining the busy world.

By merely turning one's head, one could see the flags and faces of all nations. Off the quay in front, lay a high-nosed, long black steamer—the next for England. A quarter of a mile below was one of the huge South American wool-ships, waiting for high water, to warp into dock. From the gang-way, hung a little flag, the size of a tea-cloth—the Belgian Tricolor, denoting that the “Customs” was aboard; and midway between the two vessels was moored His Imperial Brazilian Majesty's war frigate, “*San Pedro de Alcantara*.” A bell was ringing aboard her, and Surgeon-Thomson looked that way. They were changing watch. The sun shone out and gleamed on the musket of a marine who paced the quarter-deck. “Wonder whether they're such a cantankerous lot as our marines,” mused Surgeon Thomson; “always crying out for everything, except for more discipline.”

The watch was set and the “*San Pedro*” went to sleep again. But if things afloat were going to have a little siesta until the

tide brought up its new message from the sea, things ashore were moving and humming in very wakeful fashion. Piles of boxes and general merchandise lay about on the *Quai*, and, if no one was actually heaving and hauling at them just now, little crowds were walking about among the goods, surveying them, and looking just ready to work.

Surgeon Thomson amused himself on this Saturday afternoon in Mid-Lent by contemplating three idlers, and concluded that these blue rascals were as lazy as those black rascals of whom he had had thirty years' experience. A party of sailors coming from the docks passed by, evidently bent on the disbursement of superfluous dollars, and a spell of general enjoyment. They halted under the window a moment to pick up a laggard who had stayed behind to gibe at a *gensd'arme*, whom he was addressing as "you boss in buttons." The said laggard was a picturesque-looking ruffian, with a dirk-knife at his hip, and an absurdly gigantic cigar (never intended for mortal lips) in his

hand—it might have been a rolling-pin or a war club, by the way he brandished it about him. An escort was detached from the sailors to bring the straggler in, and he continued his triumphal progress, surrounded by his comrades, and singing lustily—

“ Oh, the five spot takes the four,  
And the four spot takes the three,  
And since we all are gathered here,  
We'll drink in company ! ”

They passed on, and folding themselves into a neighbouring *estaminet*, the voice of the laggard was heard no more. This broke the spell of Surgeon Thomson's reverie on rascals. In the interval between this and the next excitement, and while his thoughts are wandering out to farther scenes and times of which we know nothing, it may be well to turn our backs awhile on the river and the crowd, and look up at the open window and at the face which appears there. Indeed, if need be, we will enter the “ *Lion*

*Belge*," and mounting to his room unbidden, look at the Surgeon's back, and at anything else in the apartment which may please us—for his head is too far out of the window, and the sights and sounds on the *Quai* are too absorbing, for him to become aware of our presence. But not to be unnecessarily rude, and also that we may learn what we can from the face of the man, we will first look on him from below, while his eyes are gazing thoughtfully, almost dreamily, towards the sea and the now slanting sun. He is middle-aged, and probably younger than he looks. In ten years perhaps he may be iron-grey, at present he is iron. His hair is strong and crisp, his nose is strong and large. On starting from the forehead it had intended to have a curve, a certain well-marked outline with no wavering or indecision in its progress, and it has it—it is a beautiful curve, but with the beauty of strength. His moustache is dark and full, and from where we stand we cannot see his mouth, but his chin is clean-shaved, and

that we *can* see. It is well-formed and good-natured, but there is the same decision and strength, in keeping with all his other features. All? no, not all, for his eyes shew far different qualities—one might almost say antagonistic ones — if physiognomy can reveal the finer qualities of a man's mind.

Now, at this moment, while they are looking out into the distance, were there a London Arab here (one of that race of Arabs who can detect so keenly some forms of character); I say, were such a street-boy to look up, he would, on seeing that face, give his three "wheels" gratis, without the preliminary finger pointing to the ground, and the request to "tip us a copper"—knowing full well that the copper would come simultaneously with the third "wheel," and while the *gamin* was still enjoying an inverted view of his benefactor. But see, Surgeon Thomson has turned somewhat—ah! he is looking at the docks now, and already the expression of his eyes has altered, and the nearer middle-distance focus makes them appear

harder, colder. Now he is looking down; how those eyes sweep over everything! Did *anything*, seen or unseen, ever escape them! He is looking at us—what a stern, daring, iron man! But let us enter the '*Lion Belge*.' What is this on the table? A surgical apparatus for working the antiseptic spray. It is an improved appliance, which Surgeon Thomson has been lately engaged in perfecting. Do not touch it, for fear it should go off—or worse still, arouse the attention of the unconsciously-interviewed one. There is a box of cigars on the mantel-shelf, and lying by its side are various kinds of forceps, with divers modifications of curve, constructed at the suggestion of Surgeon Thomson. Lying about are several scientific journals, and a novel or two in the Tauchnitz edition. An open portmanteau on a couch displays some personal attire, as the advertisements say, "of no use to anyone but the owner." Beyond these there is nothing to notice, except the back view of a well-shaped figure at the window. The



[illegible]

courteous in his manner to all, he was so grave and distant, that if he smiled, which was seldom, that smile was noticed all round the mess-table.

Regimental tradition ran, that Tartar Toddy had, in early youth, been crossed in love, and had never quite recovered from it, but in later years this tradition had faded into a mere surmise, founded only on the report believed in by the last colonel. That Surgeon Thomson both talked well and danced well with the ladies, was a fact, and that the ladies openly acknowledged their appreciation and took the greatest interest in him was another fact. But no sign of special partiality, of love-fever, had ever shewn themselves to even the most jealously keen-eyed subaltern. It was agreed that the Surgeon was not a marrying man; and up to this Saturday afternoon of which I write, events had proved the verdict to be a correct one.

On his return from abroad, the men at the Club challenged him, and one, bolder than the rest, with a view of extracting his opini-

ons, had said to him, "Retired to marry, eh, surgeon?" but Tartar Toddy only smiled, and answered, "Retired for private ends"—which, it may be observed, was but a well-bred way of sending the hungry empty away. That the Surgeon had, at some period, been capable of affection, if not of love, was proved by his boyhood, when he kept the largest and best managed of all the surreptitious menageries in the school. At Eton he was good at games, and his athletic build helped him to become a leader in all sports in which he took an interest. But it was on the river that he shone most, for Thomson was a "wet bob," and it was as such that he was chiefly remembered. No one at Eton had ever said that he was eccentric; things might have become rather tempestuous if any one had. He was one of the few boys without a nickname, and they were wrong who supposed that "Tartar Toddy," was given in the "playing fields;" for it was first heard of a few months after Thomson's appointment to his regiment. He *shared* a

nickname, however, with another boy, and the two were called the "Twins." Their acquaintance commenced with a fight, and the affair, with the subsequent friendship, arose out of an entire mistake—for the termagants and future "Twins" were both in the wrong. But as Sam, the under-boatman, remarked, "When gentlemen falls out over a difference, there's nothing like a understandin', and Mr. Thomson and Mr. Castle 'ud never a' pulled pair-oar so clean together, if so be as they hadn't 'a had a few rounds over it fust, just to show there was no ill feelin'." It appeared that Mr. Castle, intending to solace himself one afternoon by sculling up to Surley, appropriated to himself an odd pair of sculls, and that Sam, who was standing by the skiff, informed him that the "right 'un was a wrong 'un," in fact a private one belonging to another gentleman.

"Then he should put his mark on it," said Castle. "Give my compliments to the gentleman, and tell him he can have it on application at Surley. Good-day Sam—I'm

in a hurry this afternoon." A few minutes afterwards, Mr. Thomson, who was always in a hurry for anything he wanted, appeared, and on being informed that one of the gentlemen had gone off with his scull, inquired his name, took down another pair, set his skiff up-stream, and was soon seen to shoot the railway-arch—also in a hurry. A stern-chase is usually a long one, but on this occasion it was not so, for it was reported that Mr. Castle was caught up at Athens—and if at this time and place there was no re-distribution of seats, there certainly was a re-distribution of sculls; for Sam who had calculated on a row, noticed when Mr. Thomson came back a few hours later, that the abstracted scull lay in the skiff. In another twenty-four hours the battle had been fought and won—Tod Thomson being the victor. A fortnight later, Castle, who took a hard-fought beating with dignity, was literally "rowing in the same boat;" and although it turned out that the scull in question had not belonged to

Thomson after all, *this* had nothing to do with the new partnership.

For the remainder of that term they were always seen together; and as time went on, their friendship made itself so felt, that among the many twos and twos who "swatted," and walked, and boated together, these two earned the more distinctive nickname of the "Twins." Their tastes, though peculiar, were the same, and the share-and-share-alike principle was so apparent that each twin was a decoy-duck to the other. If Thomson was in his study, then Castle was sure to be there also. If Thomson was seen crossing the Broccas, and Castle was not in view, he was certain to be near enough to be brought down by a shot from a rook-rifle. Both sculled for practice, but when on pleasure bent, they pulled a pair. It is superfluous to mention that they fell into and got out of the same scrapes together. All this was known to most of the boys; but there was a side of their friendship which was not so generally known—a certain

stronger, if somewhat sentimental tie, which somehow was never much observed in the knot by which the Twins were bound.

The books which were shared and discussed out of school were not exactly of the class which usually commends itself to "wet bobs," and would have been considered "soft," had they been discovered. On more than one occasion Tod Thomson had opened his heart to his friend Guy Castle, as to certain views which were just beginning to dawn upon him, and Guy had replied by confidences wonderfully similar. Thoughts and sentiments, which many of us feel, while still at school, but dare not express—if we be unpopular or bullied, for fear of yet more bullying—if we be popular, for fear of losing our popularity; and in either case, restrained by that greater fear that we shall find no sympathy. It will be observed, therefore, that the twins enjoyed the luxury of an interchange of ideas, which in no way compromised their position in the playground.

Guy was some eighteen months Tod's junior, and rather shorter and stouter in build; Tod's face had even then a graver cast, and the decisiveness written there had a certain maturity of expression; but here seniority ceased. Since Guy had become a Twin he had developed rapidly, and it was often difficult in watching their fresh-budding thoughts, to see which of the two buds was opening the quicker. It was natural to the young boy-mind of Guy that he should ever look and try to leap into the Future in all his talks with Tod: but it seemed just as natural for Tod to turn at times, and look backward into the Past.

What schoolboy has not planned out his campaign of life?

The twins had had their double campaign, mapped out, well scored, and marked with many a discussion and scheme. This map is still clear in the mind of Surgeon-Major Tod Thomson, though the proposed campaign has never been entered on; and while he is getting it out this afternoon, and



looking at the batteries which were never stormed, the heights which were never carried, the banner which was never unfurled—we, too, will glance over the plan, undefaced and undimmed by a nearly forty years' portorage within his breast.

Here, in a corner, we see set down one of the earliest questions put by Guy to Tod, "What are you going to be?" And here a devious path is marked, and a line of march is dotted across it—sometimes running along the beaten track, but cutting off all the corners and bends, the last dot being placed at the end of the track. Here sundry stars denoting hills, black and large in proportion to their height, shew a different plan of attack altogether. When, nearly forty years ago, Guy looked at this, it was explained to him, that it was a modification of his "governor's" intentions concerning him. Neither plan was ever followed in the real line of their life's march—but perhaps Surgeon Thomson remembers them all the better for that this afternoon.

Tod's father had intended him for the service, hoping by his own influence to obtain for his son a staff-appointment as soon as that enviable position could be obtained for a young officer.

Tod, himself, however, while desiring none the less to be an ἀναξ ἀνδρῶν, a leader among men, yet had a vision of a "command" of another nature. *He* wished to proceed to "King's," not Sandhurst, and having completed his education, to carry out his views by leading a colony. "You know, Guy," he argued impassionately, "colonisation as an art was lost with the fall of the Roman power. I know the Spaniards made raids in the New World, and went on just as badly as they had in the old one, but they couldn't colonise, they didn't understand it; besides, they were so beastly cruel, and never just. It's all nonsense, Guy, for you to rant about Spanish glory—a lot of mean devils always looking after loot. They can't compare with the grand old Roman glory. The Romans came, saw, conquered, and then

planted. The beastly Spanish came, butchered, pulled up, and always had to run for it, sooner or later. Now if *we* could lead a colony, Guy, say into the Far West, and make little laws until they became great ones; lick the niggers, of course: make the woods ring with a rising town, planned in the Roman fashion, and give fellows who came to us, and were strong, the right of citizenship—why, Guy, before we were old men, the town would be a new state—a new star, licking the star-spangled banner hollow.” It will be seen from the above somewhat illogical speech of Tod, that he had a full share of the wild fancies of youth in him, and that his laudable and lusty sentiments were not of a nature practicable for modern times. Guy, too, was intended for the army, but though he did not look on the service in so unfavourable a light as Tod, he was greatly influenced by such speeches. He had, as the old historians put it, “a stomach to the fight,” and he revelled in the deeds of chivalry of Castile and

Andaluse, believing that no steel was like Spanish steel—excepting, of course, the British bayonet. But Tod had made him reconsider his opinion; and then, after all, there could be plenty of adventure, and probably of fighting, if a colony, and not a company, were to be led. Tod, with a parenthetical sweep of the hand, had always said that “niggers,” whoever they were, must be licked into submission, and all evil-doers strung-up on the earliest opportunity. The niggers would certainly shew fight, and fight and adventure are one, and this is all that attracted Guy to the enterprise.

It was near the end of summer. The procession of boats was over. One hot June evening, Tod and Guy were sitting in the long arbour at Surley. Above their heads on the plastered wall was the legend, “*Floreat Etona*,” painted and re-painted year after year, in bold green letters; and here the twin Etonians were discussing once more the future campaign. The sun behind them was near his setting, and

already the shadow of the last elm nearest the river had touched the farther shore. Though Nature was resting and roosting, she was slumbering with a face full of the promise of a fine day, and of fresh endeavour on the early morrow. This evening old schemes were discussed, and some small additions made to the plan which Surgeon Tod Thomson is reviewing this afternoon.

"I wish the governor hadn't such an obstinate will. There'll be a row this time next year, when I leave. I wish he'd see reason," said Tod.

"Two of a trade never agree," answered Guy; "It's a rum thing *we* ever hit it off so well together."

"Oh, yes—but you're different. The governor's got lots of reason in him, but he won't see reason in others. He's right, always right, but *I'm* more right! I hate the service! *Otium cum insanitate*—orders for the week, month, year," continued Tod with sarcastic bitterness. "Dress, drill, mess, turn-in—dress, drill, mess, turn-in—till if

you were not a fool to start with, you become one. Look at your ass of a brother Bob! What's the good of promotion to *him*? You'll never promote his *brains*. He's a bit more cocky with his captaincy, that's all. Always jawing about the 'rules of the service.' When he was playing at whist he kept saying to me 'form fours—beg pardon, I mean will you gather the tricks." He never *sees* anything, he 'inspects.' He ought to be called 'old arithmetical progression,' for his life is spent looking down a company line, inspecting belts and buckles. Why don't you put him up to writing a military treatise? Call it 'Bob on Buttons.' Gain him a staff appointment."

"He wasn't half so shoppy before he got his commission," said Guy; "and once I thought him awfully clever."

"That's what I say, even if a fellow isn't a fool, it makes him one. The army will ruin you, Guy; besides it will separate *us*," added Tod, looking straight into Guy's face.

"No, Tod, it shan't part us. I do wish I were as rich as *you* are, though! If I were the only one, like you, it would be all right, but the governor says I shan't have much more than my commission to live on, and you want money to found a colony, don't you?"

"Yes, just at first, I suppose; but our fellows wouldn't come out of the workhouse. Besides, I should make them work, and they'd get pay for that! There's Trivett, our keeper, an awfully useful man, he can do everything, and he says he'll follow me round the world. *He'd* be paid, of course, but he's saved a good deal in our service. He gets loads of tips every season, and he never spends it."

Guy was drumming with his fist on his hat, which lay on the table, and giving it a final blow, said impetuously, "No, Tod, I'll never enter the service until you do! I say we ought to be off; we shall be late; let's get into the wherry!"

Tod stretched, and his shirt gaped over his brown chest, disclosing what might at

first sight be taken for a very rectangular blue bruise, but which, on nearer observation, proved to be Tod's arms and family motto, neatly tattooed in indigo.

"How jolly the "*SECUM CUIQUE*" is done," said Guy, contemplating this work of art, for the hundredth time that half.

"Yes. It did puzzle Trivett though. When I drew the arms he said he could copy the picture (as he called it), right enough; that was done first you know; but when it came to the motto he was in a great funk about pricking the letters, so I wrote out one at a time. He was very careful, but I didn't think I was out of the wood till a week after, when the swelling had gone down, and I read it backwards in the looking-glass. Fancy making a hash of the family motto—wouldn't it be devilish unlucky? Trivett's a dab at tattooing, but he's more proud of this one than of any he's ever done. He always wants to have a look at it, and whenever I go home for the holidays I shew it him. He says he wants



to look at the 'bit o' readin',' and he never can remember the translation. When I tell him it means, 'TO EVERY MAN BY HIMSELF,' he looks wise, and says 'there be more meanin' in what *I* put, nor that!' He thinks that the motto isn't long enough, and he's always at me to finish it, by printing in something to explain it."

"Well," said Guy, "if one of the monitors had done it, he couldn't have made it look more classical."

"Look here, Guy, *I* know how to tattoo, and I'll teach you. I'll do your arms if you like; and I say, I've a most stunning idea! On one side of the arms, so, (here Tod prodded a fore-finger under Guy's collar-bone), we'll put 'guy,' small, of course, and on the other side I'll print my name, 'tod.' Why it will be like the Roman *miles*! The shield in the middle with your chum at the side. Then," continued Tod excitedly, "you'll do me. We'll get the stuff in the town as we go back!"

Had Tod at this juncture foreseen a shield

which could not be lost and names which could not be obliterated, he would have rejoiced in the deeper rendering of the ancient poetry.

In another ten days' time Guy's chest, still somewhat sore, but blazing in indigo-blue, rivalled Tod's as a complete work of tattoo-art. It evoked as much admiration and satisfaction in the latter as could have been raised in the heart of any critical young savage, had he beheld it. The arms might be considered a perfect success, excepting, perhaps, if one were inclined to be hyper-heraldic, that the claws in the crest branched a little too much after the fashion of antlers. Those terrible talons also looked as if they wanted cutting. Still it was well worthy of a pupil of the mentor Trivett. The shield was flanked at a judicious distance by the word GUY printed in small capitals, while under the right collar-bone, TOD stood forth.

"They'll know how to find me when they want an heir," said Guy, holding his shirt

open with both hands, and surveying his chest in a small looking-glass which Tod held up with much pride. "I'll do *you* to-morrow afternoon after school. Hullo! there goes the bell for prayers."

But Guy never did tattoo the comrade names, and Surgeon Tod Thomson bears only his arms and motto to this day—a miss being as good as a mile, and often as good as the length and breadth of the earth.

The next afternoon, just as the needles and the ink had been got out, and Tod was already recumbent on his back, ready for the sacrifice, a knock at the study door stayed the proceedings, and brought with it a letter, asking the Twins to go down to the boats, to make up a "four" to row to Bray, and have tea on Monkey Island. This was an offer not to be rejected, so the tatooing was postponed till a future time. But the time, as I have said, has not yet arrived; and the forty years appear to Surgeon Thomson this afternoon, as one day.

In a nine days' wonder, the chorus cry,

"How did it come about?" This is the vortex round which whirl all the eddying hypotheses, and opinion and surmise rest not till they are quieted in the one central answer to this question. The author, who knows the answer, beworks his brains to give it in a satisfactory and intelligible form to his audience; but perhaps it is even more difficult to solve the converse, and to answer the question, "How did it *not* come about?" More especially when we are thinking that it *might* have, or *ought* to have, come about. Often is the initiated author, who has walked up and down "behind the scenes," till he is tired; who has watched time, place, circumstance; who has marked all the crooked ways in his mind, till he has learned also by heart all the crooked cracks in his dingy ceiling, fain at last to tell the plain unvarnished truth, and dashing his pen through what he has written, revoke and recant a whole page of lumbering lies, and making honest answer write simply, "It *didn't* come about."

A week after the tea on Monkey Island,

there was but one topic in the school. It became known that the Twins had quarrelled! Information was eagerly sought—in school, by notes passed round; out of school, by questions bandied from group to group, and boy to boy; but nothing was known for certain. Rumour was ready as the cricket ball—now a bold drive, good enough for four—now sent up so high as to rise almost out of sight; but always returning unsatisfactorily at last to the bowler-prophet's hand, whence it was first delivered.

The Twins never passed near enough to "cut" one another. Wherever Tod was, there Guy was *not*. Both went about as usual, and as usual the boys, on seeing Tod and Guy, were able also to say, "*Audivi alteram partem*;" which was true—but a mile off! It was quickly observed how well they managed to keep apart, even under the exigencies of school rules. Beyond this, all that was known was, that nothing was known. Statements and opinions were many, but facts were few. Sam the boatman remarked,

“Both the gen’lemen looks as if they was a-goin’ up to see the Doctor to-morrow morning! If so be as there’s any little difference between ’em, they’d better ’ave a few rounds together, just to show as there’s no ill-feelin’”—forgetful that the gentlemen were now hardly of an age to settle their little differences by the manly, but scarcely gentlemanly argument of the fist.

It was the close of the half; and as day by day went by, excitement increased rather than diminished, for it was conjectured that the row *must* be made up before the boys went home. The last day came, but with it no signs of a reconciliation. The Beadle had carried a parcel of books from Mr. Thomson’s study to Mr. Castle’s, and Mr. Castle had sent him back with a similar parcel for Mr. Thomson. Guy’s fag, who had had to help in the packing-up, reported that Castle was tearing up papers, and burning them in the grate; also that he was in “a devil of a wax, swearing and cursing at everything.” This in Castle was considered as a great sign

of wrath, for, though hot-tempered, he had never been a bully. The luckless fag could, however, on this occasion shew practical proof of his statements, for he had a bump on the side of his head, the result of its coming into contact with a boot.

"I was looking at their names cut on the book-case," continued the fag, "and he caught me such a clipper with it, and told me to go on cording the box."

Thomson's fag had even less to tell. *His* master had been sparing in his orders, and had only walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, looking out of window now and then; and when asked how things were to be packed, had only replied, "Any way, you young devil! Like you did them last time." "He's awful quiet," added the fag, "and he ain't a bit savage."

When the moon rose the next evening, it was over a deserted school. The "gentlemen" had gone home. The studies were desolate and empty; the mice peeped out on hollow rooms. In the silence and the shadow,

a melancholy remained. All else was gone. Only the names were still to be seen on the bookcase, and underneath lay a boot—but there was nothing to tell “how it all came about,” or rather how Tod’s tattooing did *not* come about.

When the boys returned after the summer holidays, latent speculation revived, and there was much interest in looking forward to the first meeting of the Twins. Perhaps they had already made it up in the holidays, over a friendly visit? Castle had already returned, but when it became known that Thomson was not coming back, there was, amid the surprise, but one opinion—that Thomson, who could get his way in everything, had managed to persuade his father to let him leave, having been determined not to make up the row. It was acknowledged that both heroes were “beastly proud,” though it was considered only natural that neither could be very comfortable to remain at Eton, under present circumstances.

The only curiosity expressed by the school



was, as to how Thomson could have "worked" it, to get his way with his father—but then, was not Thomson the boy who, having on one occasion gone "to see the Doctor," (as every one knew, to be flogged) made such a defence that he returned unscathed? That the school missed him was not to be denied; and whether Castle took it deeply to heart or not, he never made another friend for the year that he remained. The school went on; fags grew up, under the cultuing showers of missiles directed for their especial benefit, got "licked into shape," passed into the upper school, and in time, trained fags of their own; but they never forgot, as they often came across the names of the Twins, carved on desk and beam, how a great friendship had been begun and had been broken. Indeed, as new blood entered the college, and asked who the "Twins" might be, the tale became traditional, how that they were two boys "who were most awful chums, and then quarrelled and hated each other, and all about nothing at all."

Evil sometimes brings forth a late harvest of good ; and though boys are not given to moralise, it is a fact that the tale of the Twins had, on more than one occasion, a wholesome effect, and acted as a warning to quarrelsome friends.

But in the matter of the conjecture, that Thomson had somehow or other "worked" it with his father, the boys were wrong. It was not known in the college that when Thomson went home, he found that his father was in difficulties, which *he* could not "work" at all.

Difficulties so serious that return to the college was never even discussed. It was a pitiable affair altogether. Major-General Thomson, a young middle-aged man, who might fitly be described as being as upright as his ancestors, a man who had fought well in the service of his country, who had brains as well as brute courage, suddenly found himself entangled in the toils of liquidation.

The General had inherited a small but productive estate, had improved it, and had

seen in it a future well-found home for his son, his only child, when he, too, having served his country, should retire. But in his scheme he had put one iron in the fire which burned his fingers. As a military man he had been distinguished, as a land-owner he was respected and loved, socially he was brilliant and clever; but financially, he was a fool.

Like many another good man and true, he had fallen into the great railroad snare. It was very pathetic to all but the creditors; for since his wife's death the General had lived for his only son. The estate was in good condition and unencumbered; but unfortunately, instead of being content with preserving what he had got, General Thomson had wished to increase it by buying up some neighbouring property. For this end, railway-speculation offered him the earliest and best chance, and railways proved his earliest and worst ruin. The first blow came, when, being without ready money to meet a smaller collapse, he had to see half

his available timber cut down and carted off, forsooth, by a contractor for a new railway. The General swore; but did not take the warning, and when Tod arrived at the old house, he found a broken-hearted man who invited him to a "flitting."

There was only one thing to be done. To gather together what was left after paying claims, and then to find a place in which to live quietly and consistently with altered fortunes. The General chose Paris. Here the father and son remained; and it was thus that Tod, intended for the service, and so lately meditating autocratic colonisation, entered as a student at the *École de Médecine*. The effect of vicissitude on Tod was to mature and make a man of him at once. It was wonderful to watch the way in which he adapted himself to his new life. He was now not only a man, but a man of the world; of the world, and yet unworldly, but philosophical beyond his years. This fresh phase of Tod's character showed a strength and power which spoke far louder, and

promised more, than all his schoolboy talks and schemes at Eton. Indeed, had family affairs proved more prosperous, it is probable that he might have fulfilled nobly and brilliantly, though perhaps in some other and more practicable form, his boyish ideal. In his talks with his father—his only companion—he would discuss plans and ideas, but always with an absence of personal interest. They were propounded in a hypothetical and broad manner; Tod had laid aside his own hope, and appeared now to content himself with viewing it in the hopes of other people—a sentiment which commends itself to the minds of many of us nowadays. But Tod was too generous, when himself unable to make the long journey (*non cuius homini contingit adire Corinthum*), to lose his interest in others who might strive to undertake it.

Among the students, Tod was utterly misunderstood—as a matter of course. But for all that, the “haughty Englishman” was popular, and made many friendly acquaint-

ances, though he never made a friend. He was considered clever, but eccentric—a peculiarity put down as the usual one pertaining to "*les Anglais*." Eccentricity is a quality generally supposed to emanate solely from the eccentric person himself. When we ask ourselves how such and such a one will "turn out," we have, indeed, a visual impression of such a turning-out, but are probably oblivious of the many circumstances which are simultaneously turning out as fast as *they* can, and affecting the object of our speculation, if only by the attraction of cohesion. It is tempting and natural, in regarding an eccentric person, to view his eccentricities as though they were spun from the brain of a strange active human spider. But Circumstance, whose laws no man shall know, for ever spins the web of her unseen circles above him. Sometimes she is *con-*centric—and all goes well with the man, we say; sometimes, a transit-thread is spun—and we say, "the human spider does not know his own mind, he is stopping to think;" and

sometimes Circumstance would strengthen her great unseen plan—and immediately the criticised one does not as others do, he has become *eccentric*.

Before Tod had completed his course at the hospital, his father died. He had never really recovered from the shock caused by his misfortunes.

Tod carried up the cards which had been left with the *concierge*, emptied them into the waste-paper basket, tore up and burned the letters of condolence, and went alone with his father's body to *Père la Chaise*.

There was one other mourner there, however, and as Tod was leaving the grave, he looked up and saw him.

The mourner raised his hat and would have passed on, but in stepping across a plank he found himself alongside Tod. There was a mutual recognition, and the mourner, whose manner was somewhat embarrassed, said in an apologetic tone, "I—I was your fag."

Tod remained in Paris, and continued his

studies, visiting very little, on the plea of professional occupation. One day he found a card on his table; on it was written, "The Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Arthur Truscott," and Tod stuck in the looking-glass the card of his "fag."

Arthur Truscott had recently arrived in Paris as *Attaché* to the Embassy; and seeing in *Galignani* the death of General Tod Thomson, had gone to the grave out of a reverence and sympathy which he had never lost for the son.

Tod returned the call, and before he left Paris, had seen more of Arthur than of anyone else. During their intercourse, school-life was seldom referred to; but on one of the last occasions, before Tod left Paris, he mentioned the names of one or two school-fellows, and the talk turning upon old times, Truscott mentioned Castle's name, saying that he had heard he had left England, though for what destination he did not know.

Tod listened attentively, and then said gently, "You don't know, then, where he is gone, or what he is doing?"



Truscott replied that he hadn't the faintest idea; and then asked the question point-blank, which he had been dying to ask for a long while, but from which his good breeding had debarred him, knowing it had been a distasteful topic to Tod.

But this was a fair chance, for Tod had asked particulars; and Truscott, in a breathless burst, said, "Tod, tell me—*what* was the row about, *why* wasn't it made up?"

Tod, who had known what was coming, answered with most regretful emphasis, "Nothing, Arthur; it was about nothing; and kindly never refer to it again."

Tod took his M.D. degree, and left Paris. The next time he and Truscott met, was in Piccadilly, but when both were nearly thirty years older.

In the interval, Tod had, as old school-fellows say, been lost sight of.

Not so entirely, however, as Castle had been for the same period; for Tod's name had appeared in the "Army-Medical List" year after year, showing, at least, that he was in

the land of the living—while there was nothing to denote that Castle was in any known land at all. Is he at this moment leading a band of pioneers, who push on some new railroad through a hundred miles of pine, or lead it across some thirsty plain? Is he looked up to by some tribe of Indians, who have drowned their ancestral instincts in the rum of the white man, and who now helplessly look to a “pale face” as their leader and chief? Or is he some “Fifth Avenue democrat,” the owner of many a rich “notion,” a New World Dives withal?

\* \* \* \*

Perhaps the river and the foreign ships are the cause of Surgeon Tod Thomson's current of thought this afternoon. The look-out from the open window must be very wide, for he has not even yet seen all that has to be seen, and though he disappears for a moment, it is only to re-appear at the window with a fresh cigar. He looks down on the *Quai*, and then across the water, where miles away a moving funnel leads a

black train of smoke here and there over the green lands, and by its movement marks the course of the low-lying Scheldt.

Surgeon Thomson rises again, but this time it is to greet Arthur Truscott, who is being ushered into the room.

"I see you have my card, Thomson," said he, pointing to the one lying on the table; "I thought you would arrive by the last steamer, and went to meet it. I should have called yesterday, but I was over at Bruges. I've picked up some panelling there, which will do splendidly for the dining-room. By the way, that bronze Buddha which you gave me the other day in town has got me into terrible hot water at home. I found an old bracket and put the god on it, up in the hall, over the gong. My wife was out for a drive at the time, but after dinner she came to me in the smoking-room, and pleaded so hard to have it removed, that there and then I carried it off to the library. I don't believe the wife *was* frightened, but one of the maids had declared she would

never dare to dust him; indeed I believe they had threatened to mutiny if the deity were not deposed. But my troubles were not half over; I stuck him on the top of one of the book-cases, and my children went in to have a peep at him, but they set up such a hullabaloo, the governess could do nothing with them, and they were crying nearly all night. I can't help thinking some of the servants had been talking nonsense to them; but, any way, I had to play Æneas again, and carry poor Buddha off to the smoking-room, but I don't believe the tyrants will let him stay there long. It's very provoking, for the children never cried a bit when I put up the crocodile over the centre book-case!"

Surgeon Thomson looked amused; his moustache sternly lifted, and he smiled a grave smile. "Domestic tyranny, Truscott. I didn't think poor Buddha was as ugly as a crocodile; however, tastes differ. When I bought it, Dawkins, our adjutant, said it looked like a medical specimen of Addison's

disease, while *I* humbly thought there was a remote, if not a family likeness to myself. I hope your wife and children will not be of the same opinion, when they see me at Langton Binley, for it would be rather painful to all parties concerned ;” and Surgeon Thomson actually smiled again.

“My dear Thomson, what a mad idea! Do pardon me, but really”—here Truscott took a cigar from the box to which the surgeon pointed, and laughing most immoderately continued—“to think of *your* being hustled from room to room, plaintively considering my crocodile, while a chorus of women gives ‘warning’ on the stairs is—” and Arthur rolled himself and his cigar about in a fresh burst of laughter. “For goodness’ sake, though,” he added seriously, “don’t ever mention such a thing to the wife! She *is* such a nervous little woman, and the wilder or more romantic a suggestion is, the more ready is she to accept and dote upon it. She is just like the children, who insisted on going to and fro to have a

look at Buddha, though they came away crying each time. For goodness' sake don't mention it!"

"I am grieved that my mild-eyed Buddha should have produced such an antagonistic effect on your family. I knew that *you* would appreciate him, and I can also understand his influence on some nervous natures, but pray put him away, rather than have a stampede in the camp. And I don't like children being frightened; if they cannot be educated to strange sights, they ought not to be shown them. Their young brains are not strong in proportion to their young bodies. By the way, how do they stand the gong? *I* cannot stand a gong even now; it's worse than a salute."

"Well, to tell you the truth, that's what we've all found. It was a novelty at first with the children—it came out of the sacking of the 'Summer Palace,' you know—but my wife and I had to stop it, and I've hidden the gong-stick."

Surgeon Thomson looked relieved, and

remarked, "We all have our nervous weaknesses. I've seen so many unpleasant sights, that I think sounds affect me most now, for pain or pleasure; but you will think this professional callousness!"

"No, my dear Thomson," said Truscott; "I should never think *you* callous, and least of all when I did not understand your meaning. I don't think I should always understand you, but I hope I've the sense, if not the sympathy, to know that a collected man is not necessarily a cold man."

Surgeon Thomson had turned his face to the window while Arthur was speaking, and was now watching a Dutch barge which was drifting up with the tide.

"What a fine old barge that is," said Truscott, moving towards the window. "Few things have altered less during the last two hundred years, than the build of those boats. There is a quaint beauty in the clumsiness of their rounded polished stems, in keeping with the sleepy canals and lazy lands of Holland. Cuyp thought so,

for he rarely missed an opportunity of introducing a barge into his pictures."

"Yes," said Thomson, holding up his hand perpendicularly, and roughly dividing the open window into two compartments; "see now she has got beyond the quays. It's like a scene from two centuries: here, below, is the school of modern naval architecture—nineteenth century speed and the screw of Achilles, as it might be called; while there is the river—the river-tortoise, slow and sure, freighted and equipped with all the poetry of the Past. I think, this afternoon, I prefer *this* picture with the peaceful background of water meadows, and the stolid old craft crawling on to Nutterboom, where these barges of the Scheldt will drop anchor, and land to drink of Hoche and Louvain at some barge-hostelry in the village of the 'Nut-under-the-Bough.' It makes one forget the ague of the Low Countries, this."

"Yes, my dear medico-artistic friend," said Truscott, endorsing the unspoken reflections



of Surgeon Thomson. "I have to pay for the lake at Langton: every acre of water makes the woodland doubly beautiful, and every acre costs me a doctor's bill in the shooting season. I wish pills didn't so often follow the enjoyment of the picturesque. I shall never like my new buildings as I did the old wing which was burned down. There is no doubt but that *you* would approve the change. By-the-bye, would you like to see a piece of tapestry which I have bought? It's at my hotel. I made Dobbles hang it up for me to look at this morning—I don't think he will have taken it down yet. And then we can have a walk before dinner."

"Certainly," said the surgeon, carefully collecting his instruments and placing them in his portmanteau. "I should like it very much." And in a few minutes they were on their way to the *Hôtel de l'Empereur* in the *Place du Mein*.

"There, that's it," said Truscott, when they had entered his room in the hotel. "Here, Dobbles, leave those clothes, and

come and hold this fold open." Dobbles appeared from an adjoining room, if "fat and scant of breath," a body-servant after one's own heart. "Here, catch hold of it there a moment." Dobbles lifted the heavy drapery, and held it open to the best of his ability, looking at Surgeon Tod Thomson with a sense of satisfaction on his honest face, which said more forcibly than words, "There, what do you think of *that*? My master and me knows what's what."

The tapestry represented Dutch boers drinking at a tavern, after Teniers, and called forth the praises of the surgeon.

"The colours," said Truscott, "are just faded enough for the figures not to appear too prominent and ghastly. I prefer all tapestry when it is faded; when the figures are too bright, they have all the evils and bad taste of a wax-work exhibition. I bought this off such a scamp. Here's his card, 'Maurice Davids in the *Rue Haute—Achète et vend—or, argent, diamants, antiquités, passementeries et galons.*' A thorough Jew;

pretended he had made a mistake in the price, when he'd swindled me. How is it these fellows get hold of all the good things of life? There, that will do, Dobbles."

Surgeon Thomson was examining some Delft dishes which were stacked on the floor by the stove, and which looked as if they were warming for the banquet of some goodly burgomeister, who had invited Rubens to feast with him.

"I want to call at a shop across the *Place*," said Truscott, "and then we can walk round the town. Dobbles, we shall be back to dinner at eight o'clock. Lock my door, if you go out, and for God's sake don't lose your way."

When Truscott returned, *he* had both lost his way and lightened his purse; but the two friends sat down to dinner well contented with the "prowl."

After they had finished, the genial host spent the time while digestion was going on, in surveying his purchases, discoursing on their various merits and demerits, and com-

menting again and again on his treasures, in the fashion which is so fascinating to the enthusiastic art-amateur. In Surgeon Thomson he had a sympathetic admirer, together with an instructive and enlightened critic, for Thomson had not lived in a land of art with his keen eyes shut ; and his comparisons between the ancient cultured, and the modern barbaric splendour would have bound up into a monograph, well worthy the attention of any art-student.

The cathedral carillon had played for the hundredth time, and then in more elaborate tunes when midnight had arrived. And still the two sat talking.

“By the way, Thomson,” said Truscott, looking at his watch, “you know this is the *Mi-carême*. There will be a political pageant to-morrow at midday : we must see it. But there’s a *bal masqué* to-night at the *Variétés*. It’s a *bourgeois* affair ; any one can go by paying. What do you say to our looking in ? They keep it up all night. We shall see some good costumes and

draperies, for many of those who will take part in the procession to-morrow will wear their carnival get-up to-night."

"I was intending to be in Brussels on Monday," replied Thomson; "indeed I have written to Mons. Le Breton to say I will accompany him in his round of the hospital in the afternoon, but I can make up by a long sleep to-morrow for the loss of it to-night. If we go, there will be too much to see for us to turn in early; however, let us go."

It was a clear, cold night, with a sharp frost. As the two friends walked through the deserted streets, a figure would appear, from time to time, sometimes clad entirely in white, and after silently moving on in front, disappear round some dark corner.

"What a weird effect," said Thomson, as another figure shot out of an entry just ahead, gleamed in the moon's rays with a blue-green light, and then vanished in the gloom and shadow across the street.

"Though we know they are masqueraders, it would be easy to fancy that they are

ghostly ones, come out for a prowling in some City of the Dead."

At the *Varietés*, the assembled ghosts were depositing shawls and wraps, while female masqueraders were assisting, or being assisted to put the final touches to their dress—and metamorphosing a mere meaningless collection of garmentry into the pristine idea of the wearer. Some of the more elaborated human bundles were unfolding and unwinding themselves after the fashion of huge double-dahlias, while those who were finished, and again for the *last* time finished, were joining their companions, and mounting the great staircase which led into the Hall of Babel.

Even at this hour dancers were arriving, and Truscott and Thomson passed in with a crowd of new arrivals. At first, the change from the quiet and empty streets to the noise and din, the teeming throng, the glittering dresses, the heated atmosphere, appealed to so many senses at once that all were somewhat blunted, and in all the roar

of the multitude they chiefly distinguished the guttural utterance of some young Gretchen, as she passed by in quest of her lost lover. But they gradually grew sufficiently accustomed to mark more of the many sights and sounds which were being shaken up in this ballot-box of Vanity Fair.

The *Variétés* had once been a theatre, but was now used chiefly as a dancing hall, the *loges* being turned into a gallery for spectators, while the *fauteuils* had been done away. The whole floor of the auditorium was boarded over, but at an incline which rendered the dancing a series of unseemly rushes and slow and toilsome ascents. But the chief platform was that formed by the stage, now transformed into a broad far-reaching hall, with an orchestra box at the end; while what was once the "wings" was used as a promenade.

"The world and his wife" were there with a vengeance. There was the English and the French sailor in the flesh; together with the English and French sailor grotesquely paro-

died by the young Antwerp apprentice. There were few who attended but came in uniform, or costume of some sort or other. Though the majority were of the *bourgeois* class, there were a few exceptions to the rule, these being chiefly noticeable by their not joining in the dancing. They had also the appearance of foreigners. His Satanic Majesty was largely represented, and in variety of rendering, reminded one of the various mental images impressed upon us by the theologians of different schools. There was the benign devil, the horrible devil, the atrocious devil, the grinning devil, and lastly the devil who glided about hardly looking like a devil at all. Not only was the animal, the personage, the idea represented singly, but these were combined into groups. Parties of roystering monks pushed their way through noisy cries of recognition and admiration, augmented to maddening excitement when, by pre-arrangement, they ran into the arms of a corresponding group of nuns, who saluted the brethren with a



holy kiss, and behaved in an unseemly fashion, never permitted by any monk or nun—when the eye of the public was upon them. Many of the groups bore allusion to topics of the day—chiefly political, and of these perhaps the most popular were those which portrayed the contest raging between the priests and the people. “*A bas, Loup !*” was the refrain of a song breaking out at intervals on the lips of everyone, and sometimes caught up from a little group, and rolling in a fierce volley round the hall, like the roar of an angry breaker.

Amid the bewildering Flemish spoken by large heavy-footed women, the lighter French of the more *élite* was agreeably heard, and now and then one turned at the sound of an English voice.

The dances followed each other so rapidly, that the powers of endurance of the orchestra appeared amazing.

Good measure was certainly given. The vales were divided by the “*demi-temps*,” during which panting couples drew breath,

and falling into line, promenaded round the area, producing a very pretty effect, and giving a chance of examining more minutely the glories of costume, while the band mopped its head for one brief moment.

Perhaps the dancers were the most orderly of the company. The crowds of promenaders who had come merely to enjoy the ball, were engrossed in uproariously recognising their friends under their many disguises, and were falling on any and everyone's neck at intervals. It was the freedom of the Mid-Carnival, and anybody and everybody greeted everybody with the license which custom allows to the time.

Surgeon Tod Thomson had been in too many scenes to do other than attempt a smile, when a creature, in the garb of a Trappist, made a show of shriving him, or when a gaudily-dressed Gretchen made a low courtesy to the two, saying with a rogueish laugh, "*Anglais, n'est-ce pas vrai, Messieurs?*" and then passed on.

Late as was the hour, the motley crowds

showed no sign of weariness, or of dispersing; and when, thirsty from their exertions, they disappeared to drink of the weak beers which were being dispensed in the canteen and the side-saloons, it was only to re-appear with fresh vigour for the fray. Indeed, had this ballet, in which everyone was an actor, been printed on a play-bill, it might have been described as a "Romp of all Nations run mad."

"Really," said Truscott, looking at a quadrille, where eight solemn "frows" were plodding through the figures, with all the wooden gravity of so many marionettes, "really, there are not many pleasant faces, at least to an Englishman's fancy; but the costumes are all good, and many of them superb. Ah! we don't understand costume, as a nation. Just look at that fellow dressed like an armourer: I'll wager he's a barber, or something of that sort, but there's nothing in his carriage suggesting the "super." Now, in England, such a fellow would be standing like a suit of armour when it's

empty: or else be clutching at his stupid joints with a broad grin on his face, as if dropping to pieces were rather a joke than otherwise. I remember once a Norman knight riding in a Lord Mayor's Show, and while he calmly nursed one shoulder-piece upon his saddle-bow, displaying the sleeve of a costermonger's blue guernsey, he kept all the time pointing his iron nose about, vainly endeavouring to see how much more he had dropped. His nose-piece made him look like some gigantic sharp-snouted mole set up on horseback. You would never see that sort of thing here, for they are not content with costume displayed on a dummy."

"I have noticed," said Tod, "that though all are thoroughly enjoying themselves, their characters fit them as easily and naturally as their costumes. The instinct of acting is common to them all."

They were standing by a column at the farther end of the auditorium, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers; dancers out of

breath were waiting for a moment's rest, preparatory to continuing the gallop up the incline.

There was the burr of many conversations carried on in many tongues. A wasp-waisted officer of the Guard, was making love to his partner, looking far more like a Mephistopheles than the one at his side, who was industriously repairing and looping up a broken tail. Immediately in front of Thomson were two naval officers. They were both in uniform, and talking in Portuguese. The younger man looked about five-and-twenty, was singularly unprepossessing in countenance, and might be a lieutenant. Though apparently a naval officer by his uniform, there was something so piratical in his profile, that Tod looked again to see whether he was professionally or only theatrically attired. His companion, whom he was addressing in an excited voice and high key, was a middle-aged, stout-built man, with a dark sun-burned complexion. The lower part of his face was hidden by a bushy

black beard and large moustache. He, too, was in uniform, that of a senior officer. Turning from the face of the younger man to that of his elder companion, one felt inclined to apply to *him* for credentials of respectability, if indeed any credentials could elevate one's opinion of the lieutenant's countenance.

\* \* \* \*

What exactly happened, and *how* it happened, no one seemed to know; but Truscott, who was watching the galop, suddenly turned to find his friend in altercation with the two officers.

As far as could be made out, some of the dancers, in galoping down the incline, had become packed, and in a body had charged into the crowd; anyway, the lieutenant, in a most violent fury, was pouring out his feelings at Surgeon Tod Thomson, in a volley of Portuguese.

Tod, turning to Truscott, said, "Is the fellow mad? I've been kicked—that's all I know!"

"Inglez!" stuttered the lieutenant, standing on tip-toe in his wrath, and then commenced an attempt to express his rage in very unintelligible English. The elder man, who was calmer, seeing the position, spoke some few words to his companion, and then addressing Surgeon Thomson in excellent English, said, "My friend complains that you have insulted him, and he requires from you an apology."

Surgeon Thomson looked scornfully at the lieutenant, and turning to the elder man, said, in a quiet, but very decided tone, "That I cannot give—your friend's legs are as ill-balanced as his tongue. *He* has kicked *me*."

Hitherto the elder man had been moderate in his demeanour, but he, too, now appeared to be losing his temper.

The lieutenant kept addressing his friend and Thomson alternately, with unabated excitement. Truscott, who had remained silent, now spoke on his friend's behalf, but only made matters worse by unconsciously

classing the elder man with the lieutenant, who was really the sole aggressor.

This served to confuse the cross-purposes more than ever. Surgeon Thomson, by this time indignant, appeared to suspect the interpreter of misinterpreting—and certainly there *was* a hesitation in his manner of translating the surgeon's assertion that the lieutenant had "kicked him." However, the venue was suddenly changed by Surgeon Thomson inquiring in an incredulous voice of the elder man, if he had properly repeated his words, and in haughty fashion demanding an apology.

"That is an insult! You have given me the lie!" returned the man, now raised to a high pitch of anger. "May I know whom I have the honour of addressing? We must meet again!"

"Instantly, sir! Arthur, will you make the arrangements?" and in another moment, from a most trivial and vexatious *bagatelle*, Surgeon Tod Thomson found himself "called out."



Truscott made a vain attempt to bring the parties to their senses; but the elder man was now inexorable, and Truscott had to take the proffered card, on which was printed:—

D<sup>r</sup> Castello,  
Medico, *San Pedro de Alcantara.*

while Dr. Castello accepted his opponent's, and read:—

Surgeon-Major Thomson,  
Late H.M. Royal Artillery, United Service Club.

The lieutenant appeared somewhat appeased, and seemed hugely gratified at future prospects. After conferring with Dr. Castello for a moment, he turned to Truscott, and saluting, said, "Burgerhout Gate—outside—six hours in the morning—we bring pistols." The other officer then saluted Arthur, who bowed, and immediately left with Surgeon Thomson.

When they were in the street, Truscott began to inquire about the circumstances which had led to the affair. He was annoyed

at the triviality, the absurdity of the adventure in which they were now involved. "Besides," said he, "it was the other ruffian, after all. How did you manage to get challenged by the doctor?"

On this point Tod could give but little enlightenment.

"I consider that I was insulted by both; they refused to apologise, and then demanded satisfaction. Perhaps it is strange, but I have never yet given anyone 'satisfaction;' however, I am quite ready to do so, especially when it is I who have been insulted."

"I'm sure, I am most sorry, Tod," poor Arthur said in a pathetic way, "for had I not asked you to come, it would never have happened. I felt desperately inclined to challenge the other ruffian myself. Let's see what his name is;" and taking out his pocket-book he held up the card, and read aloud as he stood under a lamp-post:—

Luis Gomperro,  
Capitão Ten<sup>te</sup>.,

*San Pedro de Alcantara.*

"That's his name, is it?" said Thomson, "I congratulate his Brazilian Majesty on the services of such a pirate."

"I thought the Doctor seemed as if he wanted the affair amicably settled at first," said Truscott; "I was most astonished when *he* challenged you. I'm afraid that it was your unfortunate remark about the interpreting that did it."

"The half-devilish, half-drunken pirate was at the bottom; then the doctor (what's his name? Castello?) felt obliged to stand by his friend, and then did *not* interpret correctly what I said, for fear of further complications—and then, somehow, he in turn felt himself injured—why, I cannot tell. It really doesn't matter. I'm vexed, though, as I *have* to go out, that it is not against the pirate; I think Dr. Castello is nearly as unfortunate as myself."

"Well, I am exceedingly sorry about it," said Arthur, "and if I could stop it legitimately, I'd do it at once. I don't see why you should have to stand fire, because a fellow

one has never even been introduced to, and whom you will never see again probably, chooses to pick a quarrel in a crowd. The Brazilians are used to rows which in our navy would disgrace a common marine."

They had now come to the quay; it was the last of the ebb, and in the bright starlight the tall masts and square yards of the "*San Pedro de Alcantara*" were cut in sharp outline.

"That's the frigate," said Tod. "Will he bring another second? Does he expect *us* to?"

"No," replied his friend; "he didn't seem inclined to wait for a more formal cartel. I suppose it's Brazilian etiquette to arrange matters on the spot."

"He was in a hurry, certainly; perhaps the "*San Pedro*" is under sailing orders," said Thomson. "Let's see—six o'clock, outside the Burgerhout Gate—that's the other side of the town. It's now a little after four; I shan't go to bed, I'm afraid I might not be awakened. What will *you* do?"

"My dear Thomson, why stay with you. We haven't quite two hours, and we can walk up to the ground. When does the sun rise this morning?"

"A quarter past six," replied Tod, who was lighting a cigar, adding, "But do you happen to have a case of pistols? I haven't. One doesn't usually walk about prepared to enforce an argument with a revolver. What shall we do?"

"Why," said Truscott, looking at his watch, "you had better go to your hotel and get ready, while I go and hire a case from Lecomte, the gunmaker in the *Rue Rubens*. I shall have to knock him up; but they are used to this sort of thing here. I'll call for you, when I've got them. Good-bye—God bless you;" and Arthur hurried off to Lecomte's with feelings which he had concealed from Tod.

"Confound it!" he mused to himself as he went along. "The chance of such a good fellow coming to grief over such a trumpety affair! I suppose all matters are settled for

us above, but I *do* think Thomson's advocate might have managed better. If he's shot I shall challenge Dr. Castello and the pirate. I think I ought to have challenged the pirate at the time, but really at one's time of life, such rows are ——" and here the good fellow, the good fag, the good friend, stopped short in his reflections; and the narrow street turned itself into the picture-gallery at Langton, and every window became a picture of some ancestor, and the Madonna and Child above the shop-door at the street-corner took the look of his wife, who seemed coming to meet him with little Gus in her arms. Then his vision vanished, and he was at the door of Lecomte, the gunmaker.

Surgeon Thomson went up to his room, and made his preparations. He did not write any notes, or put his things in order, or throw up the window, and leaning out, say to himself, "to-day I may be dead;" or do any of those things which I should have to make him do, if I were merely writing a

tale ; he simply shaved, and got out a clean shirt from his portmanteau, and then, ready-dressed, awaited his friend's arrival. Truscott did not keep him long, and was shortly heard knocking at the door.

"I've got them," he said, as he entered with a case in his hand. "I had no difficulty at all. The old fellow, after hearing what I wanted out of the window, came down as readily as a general practitioner. He very carefully selected a couple of pistols, and most politely thought they would just "suit Monsieur."

"I think it's time to be moving," said Tod at last, filling his cigar-case. "Are you supplied?" pointing to the cigar-box. "Well, then, let's be off."

It was beginning to show the first of the dawn. The long narrow winding street was yet in darkness, but above, the corbe-steps of the old Spanish houses were making a castellated outline against the light-blue sky. Now and then, parties returning home from the *Variétés*, flitted up the street in front,

looking more like ghosts than ever. As the two friends crossed the *Place du Mein*, a gendarme cried "*Vive la Cavalcade !*" to a party of mock Capuchins, and the Capuchins replied "*Vive la Cavalcade !*" but rather in the mechanical tone of a pass-word than as the enthusiastic counter-cry of a few hours back.

It grew lighter as they neared the *Place d'Armes*, and the upper town was reached.

The hour had struck, and the joyful cathedral carillon was ringing out as the Burgerhout Gate came in sight. The guard had just opened the gate, and a huge waggon filled with joyful peasants came rumbling through. The colossal Flemish horses strained at the traces of the triumphal car, and the Louvain peasant-band struck up the *Marseillaise*, played on hautboys and flutes adroitly covered with rushes, to mark the occupation of the inhabitants of this little Louvain village. The driver, a great giant, made greater by being clothed in straw-armour, lifted his heavy whip and shouted



"*Vive la Cavalcade!*" and the peasants cried in joyful chorus, "*Vive la Cavalcade!*" and then commenced the second verse of the *Marseillaise*, the words of which were chanted by the giant in straw.

"I suppose that's the ground?" said Surgeon Thomson, when they had passed the port-cullis and draw-bridge, pointing to a level piece of green-sward, running level with the ditch outside the fortifications. "What's the time?"

Arthur looked at his watch. "It is ten minutes past six. Here they are," said he, as a vigilante slowly came through the gate, and rumbled over the bridge.

In a moment the carriage drew up, and Dr. Castello and the lieutenant got down. Both were in uniform with side-arms, and the latter carried a shining case.

The parties saluted Surgeon Thomson and Truscott, who bowed; and Dr. Castello, obliged by the want of an English-speaking second, saluted again, and begged the pardon of the Surgeon-Major for keeping him

waiting. The place was immediately chosen ; and Dr. Castello, unbuckling his sword, laid it with his tunic on the ground, while Surgeon-Thomson, divesting himself of his coat and tunic, stood up in his shirt. So quiet, so grand he looked—it seemed hard to court death in such a fashion as this. So thought Truscott, but both men were firm, and no compromise could now be made.

As a matter of form, both seconds casually inspected each combatant, to see that they were properly clothed, and had no such thing as a shirt of mail under their garments. When the seconds advanced to Surgeon Thomson, he smiled, and unfastened his shirt-studs ; but the seconds went back immediately to choose and load the pistols. Truscott objected to the heavy holsters of Dr. Castello, and Lecomte's lighter ones were selected.

The seconds then loaded, and offered one to each man. And now, in a great round ball of flame, the sun rose over the fertile plain, and shone on the great fortifications,

causing the bayonet of a sentry in the neighbouring bastion to shimmer, who was casting furtive glances at the scene below, blessing the Virgin, whom he had lately cursed for putting him on sentry-duty this cold morning, but who was going to make it up to him by a view of "*une affaire d'honneur*."

The vigilant Truscott, who had acted "second" on more than one occasion for a friend, when *attaché* at Vienna, and was well versed in all the advantages to be gained or lost in the duello, cast a scrutinising look at the sun, and then at Surgeon Thomson, and seeing that he had more of its rays than was his share, had their positions changed. And now the two men, with the rising sun athwart them, stood face to face, at twenty paces, with their pistols cocked and pointing to the ground.

The seconds are also in position, and Truscott in a clear steady voice counts one—two—three, and ere the white handkerchief has reached the dew, Dr. Castello has fired. In the fraction of a second that

follows, and before there is time to see any effect, Surgeon Thomson's pistol goes up, wavers, he will fire in the air—no; Surgeon Thomson stands firm, and Dr. Castello, reeling round, falls with a thud to the ground.

The lieutenant looks perplexed, and advancing to Surgeon Thomson, salutes and says in broken English, waving his hand in the direction of the fallen man, "No surgeon, Senhor." But Thomson has hurried past him and is already on his knees, supporting Castello. Surgeon Thomson cut open the wounded man's shirt and saw—what did he see? A wound below the second rib, and turning him gently, another, the mark of exit behind, and below the seventh.

The Surgeon raised him gently, for he was nearly choking, while Truscott tore strips from his own shirt with which to plug the wounds.

Then he made an extemporised bandage, and then, as he wiped the blood away from

the upper wound, he saw another wound, the scars of school-boy days, and they spelt TOD.

\* \* \* \*

Surgeon Thomson turned ghastly pale as he covered all up with the bandages, but rising, assisted the seconds to bear Guy Castle to the carriage.

Had Truscott also seen? For he, too, looked as if he had seen a ghost.

"I shall go down to the ship," said Tod; but he seemed as if in a dream; and the carriage slowly retraced its way.

As Tod supported the wounded man, he bent to his ear and said something, but Guy, with his eyes closed and his face growing very white, made no answer.

Once on board the "*San Pedro*," Surgeon Thomson superintended Guy's removal to his cabin, and having had him placed on a couch, asked to be taken to the dispensary.

There he surveyed the rows of bottles, and taking down one, measured some of its contents into a beaker. Then selecting

some lint and bandages he went to a little cupboard, opened it, took down a smaller bottle, unstopped it, and poured a part of it into a still smaller one which he had taken from a drawer. This he carefully corked, and then placing it in his breast-pocket, returned to Guy's cabin. Cautiously and tenderly as a woman he bandaged the wound once more. When he had done all that could be done for the present, he leaned down and said once more "Guy," but Guy appeared as if asleep, and made no reply.

Then Surgeon Thomson left, having explained to one of the lieutenants who spoke French, that he went to get another surgeon. As Tod was stepping into the shore boat, Lieutenant Gomperro asked enquiringly, "Senhor, he will die?" to which Tod replied only by bowing his head a little lower, and the lieutenant exclaimed, "Santo Deos," and lit a cigarette.

\* \* \* \*

But Guy Castle did not die, despite the wound which all had pronounced mortal.

By one of those rare recoveries, which from time to time are recorded as little short of medical miracles, Guy Castle rallied, relapsed, rallied again, and in eighteen months had gained not convalescence, but robust health.

\* \* \* \*

When Truscott, hailing a small boat, also boarded the "*San Pedro de Alcantara*," to make inquiries, he found that Surgeon Thomson had just left, having brought M. le Docteur Desauges, the senior surgeon to the Hospital at Antwerp, who was still in attendance. From him Truscott learned little more than that the wounded man was at present in a state of collapse.

\* \* \* \*

When Arthur Truscott enters Tod Thomson's room in the "*Lion Belge*," he finds everything as he had left it a few hours before. Surgeon Thomson cannot have returned. Truscott crosses the room, and throwing up the window looks out on the "*San Pedro*." Then he turns and advances—to grip Tod's hand, for Tod is

lying on the bed in the recess. He is asleep, but from that sleep his old fag will never awake him.

And so Life had separated them, and after Life came Death, and parted "the Twins."

END OF VOL. I.



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